

# ELVIRA

Mistress of the Dark™



Press Information



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# elvira<sup>®</sup>

## Mistress of the Dark™

Top: Bob (DANIEL GREENE) is bewitched by Elvira (CASSANDRA PETERSON) and her considerable charms in "ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK" from New World Pictures.

Bottom: Every kid in town rallies to Elvira's (CASSANDRA PETERSON) side in New World Pictures' "ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK."



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## Mistress of the Dark<sup>™</sup>



Left: No one makes a first impression like Elvira.

(CASSANDRA PETERSON) in "ELVIRA,  
MISTRESS OF THE DARK" from New World  
Pictures.

Right: Elvira (CASSANDRA PETERSON) is mad as  
hell and isn't going to take it anymore in  
"ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK" from  
New World Pictures.

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# elvira<sup>®</sup>

## Mistress of the Dark<sup>™</sup>



Left: Not even 911 will take Elvira's. (CASSANDRA PETERSON) calls in New World Pictures' "ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK."

Right: Nightmares aside, everything's just fine for Elvira (CASSANDRA PETERSON) in "ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK" from New World Pictures.



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Mistress of the Dark

Top: Evil Uncle Vincent (W. MORGAN SHEPPARD) persuades Elvira's love interest, Bob (DANIEL GREENE), to mind his own business in "ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK" from New World Pictures.

Bottom: Thug-for-hire Travis (JEFF CONAWAY) stakes out Elvira's favorite haunts in New World Pictures' "ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK."



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Mistress of the Dark™



Elvira (CASSANDRA PETERSON) reveals that her true ambition all along has been to be a Las Vegas entertainer in New World Pictures' "ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK."

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# elvira®

## Mistress of the Dark™



Chastity Pariah (EDIE MCCLURG) (left) lets loose a lurry of adjectives describing her feelings toward new resident Elvira in "ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK" from New World Pictures.



HOUSTON  
DALLAS  
KANSAS CITY  
NEW ORLEANS

ALVIN GUGGENHEIM AND ASSOCIATES / advertising & public relations

Dear Editor:

"ELVIRA MISTRESS OF THE DARK," rated PG-13 from New World Pictures, will open on Friday, September 30th at selected theatres.

Best regards,

*Gerrri Frasier*

Gerrri Frasier

# ELVIRA

## Mistress of the Dark™

NEW WORLD PICTURES

and

NBC PRODUCTIONS

Present

ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK

Starring

ELVIRA

W. MORGAN SHEPPARD

DANIEL GREENE

SUSAN KELLERMANN

JEFF CONAWAY

and

EDIE McCLURG

as

Chastity Pariah

Co-Starring

KURT FULLER

PAT CRAWFORD BROWN

LEE McLAUGHLIN

FRANK COLLISON

BILL MOREY

WILLIAM DUELL

MARIO CELARIO

JACK FLETCHER

HUGH GILLIN

WILIAM CORT

Also Starring

ELLEN DUNNING

IRA HEIDEN

SCOTT MORRIS

and

KRIS KAMM

as

Randy

Featuring

ROBERT BENEDETTI

LYNN STEWART

CHARLES WOOLF

Music by

JAMES CAMPBELL

Executive Producer

MICHAEL RACHMIL

Supervising Producer

JOEL THURM

Written by

SAM EGAN &

JOHN PARAGON &

CASSANDRA PETERSON

Produced by

ERIC GARDNER &

MARK PIERSON

Directed by  
JAMES SIGNORELLI

**CAST**  
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

|                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Director              | PHIL RUBENSTEIN     |
| Technical Director    | LARRY FLASH JENKINS |
| Elvira                | AS HERSELF          |
| Associate Producer    | DAMITA JO FREEMAN   |
| Anchor Woman          | TRESS MAC NEILLE    |
| Hairdresser           | EDWINA MORRE        |
| Rudy                  | MARIO CELARIO       |
| Earl Hooter           | LEE MC LAUGHLIN     |
| Cameraman             | BILL SWEARINGEN     |
| Manny                 | CHARLES WOOLF       |
| Messenger             | WILLIAM DANCE       |
| Lawyer/Game Show Host | WILLIAM CORT        |
| Game Show Girl        | SHARON HAYS         |
| Cop                   | BILL CABLE          |
| Gas Station Attendant | JOHN PARAGON        |
| Hitchhiker            | JOSEPH ARIAS        |
| Chastity Pariah       | EDIE MC CLURG       |
| Randy                 | KRIS KAMM           |
| Sean                  | SCOTT MORRIS        |
| Bo                    | IRA HEIDEN          |
| Mr. Rivers            | BILL MOREY          |
| Mrs. Meeker           | PAT CRAWFORD BROWN  |
| Mr. Meeker            | WILLIAM DUELL       |
| Robin Meeker          | ELLEN DUNNING       |
| Travis                | JEFF CONAWAY        |
| Billy                 | FRANK COLLISON      |
| Bob Redding           | DANIEL GREENE       |
| Patty                 | SUSAN KELLERMANN    |
| Bartender             | LYNN STEWART        |
| Charlie               | DERYL CARROLL       |
| Mrs. Morissey         | MARIE SULLIVAN      |
| Vincent Talbot        | W. MORGAN SHEPPARD  |
| Mr. Bigelow           | JACK FLETCHER       |
| Gonk                  | AS HIMSELF          |
| Calvin Cobb           | ROBERT BENEDETTI    |
| Mr . Glotter          | KURT FULLER         |
| Anita                 | KATE BROWN          |
| Sheriff               | HUGH GILLIN         |
| Little Old Lady       | EVE SMITH           |

(more)

Minister  
Las Vegas Dancers

RALEIGH BOND  
TONY BURRER  
ALAN DEWAMES  
TIM HILL  
JAMES P. HOGAN  
ALEXANDRE MAGNO  
SEBASTIAN RUSSELL  
READ SCOT  
JAMES ZYZACK STERLING  
PETER BLANCO, JR.  
GABRIEL COLBERT  
MICHAEL A. JACKSON  
DERON MC BEE  
DEREK GIVENS

LAS VEGAS RAPPERS

LAS VEGAS MUSCLE MEN

PETE ANTICO  
RICK AVERY  
GREGORY J. BARNETT  
GEOF BREWER  
ANTHONY CECERE  
EURLYNE EPPER  
JEANNIE EPPER

JACK GILL  
SANDRA GIMPEL  
TED GINCIG  
JOHN HOCK  
THOMAS J. HUFF  
STEVE HULIN  
ROSEMARY JOHNSTON

MATT MC COLM  
KATHLEEN O'HACO  
WILLIAM R. PERRY  
JAMES J. POSLOF  
ANNA MARIA RAPAGNA  
DEBBY LYNN ROSS  
EDWARD J. URLICH  
JACK WEST

**Stunt Players**

Directed By  
Produced By  
  
Written By  
  
Executive Producer  
Supervising Producer  
Music By  
Film Editor  
Costume Designer  
Production Designer  
Director Of Photography  
Casting By

JAMES SIGNORELLI  
ERIC GARDNER and  
MARK PIERSON  
SAM EGAN &  
JOHN PARAGON &  
CASSANDRA PETERSON  
MICHAEL RACHMIL  
JOEL THURM  
JAMES CAMPBELL  
BATTLE DAVIS  
BETSY HEIMANN  
JOHN DE CUIR, JR.  
HANANIA BAER  
DENNIS ERDMAN

(more)

|                                |                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Unit Production Manager        | CLEVE LANDSBERG        |
| 1st Assistant Director         | PAUL MOEN              |
| 2nd Assistant Director         | NILO OTERO             |
| Additional Photography &       | MATTHEW LEONETTI       |
| Las Vegas/Game Show            |                        |
| Script Supervisor              | FRANK TUDISCO          |
| Production Coordinator         | LAURA HOFFMAN          |
| Casting Secretary              | ELIZABETH FELS         |
| Extra Casting Coordinator      | WILLIAM DANCE          |
| Camera Operators               | DENNIS SMITH           |
| 1st Assistant Cameramen        | MICHAEL ST. HILAIRE    |
| 2nd Assistant Cameramen        | DAN ELSASSER           |
| Still Photographer             | MICHAEL WELDON         |
| Sound Mixer                    | CRAIG MORSE            |
| Boom Operator                  | STEPHEN ULLMAN         |
| Cable Person                   | BRUCE BIRMELIN         |
| Key Grips                      | WILLIAM NELSON, C.A.S. |
| Best Boy Grips                 | JULES STRASSER         |
| Dolly Grips                    | KENNETH SCHWARZ        |
| Chief Lighting Technicians     | PAUL FERRARA           |
| Assistant Lighting Technicians | JOHN LINDER            |
| Property Master                | GEORGE HALVERSON       |
| Assistant Prop Master          | LLOYD BARCROFT         |
| Set Decorator                  | EDMUNDO SEPULVEDA      |
| Leadman                        | ANTONIO GARRIDO        |
| Set Designer                   | MARK BUCKALEW          |
| Construction Coordinator       | PATRICK R. BLYMYER     |
| Art Department Assistant       | WARREN KROEGER         |
| Standby Painter                | ROBERT A. FILLIS       |
| Concept Sketches               | ART LIPSCHULTZ         |
| Special Effects Coordinator    | DENNIS R. CRIPPS       |
| Assistant Special Effects      | BRUCE A. GIBESON       |
| Costume Supervisor             | ROBERT I. DOTTINI      |
|                                | BEVERLI EAGAN          |
|                                | STACEY MC INTOSH       |
|                                | LISA NEIL              |
|                                | RONALD ASHMORE         |
|                                | DAVID DURRARD          |
|                                | DENNIS DION            |
|                                | CHRIS BURTON           |
|                                | RICK HILL              |
|                                | ANDREA WEAVER          |

(more)

## Costumers

Makeup Supervisor  
 Key Hairstylist  
 Special Makeup Effects And  
 The Pot Monster  
 Special Vincent Makeup  
 Stunt Coordinator  
 "Maniac" Choreographer  
 Location Manager  
 2nd 2nd Assistant Director  
 Transportation Coordinator  
 Greensman  
 Craft Service  
 Animal Trainer  
 Production Auidtors  
 Assistant Auidtors

## Assistant To Mr. Signorelli

Assistant To Mr. Rachmil  
 Assistant To Mr. Gardner  
 Assistant To Mr. Pierson  
 Assistant To Mr. Thurm  
 Assistant To Ms. Peterson  
 Production Assistants

ROBERT BERDELL  
 THERESA V. LAURSEN  
 PAMELA S. WESTMORE  
 LISA MEYERS  
 DOUG BESWICK PROD. , INC.

STEVE LAPORTE  
 MONTY COX  
 DONA DAVIS-CLARKE  
 ANDREE JUVILER  
 PATRICIA DYER  
 MIKE DOYLE  
 ALFONSO GORIS  
 CHRISTINE SOTEROS  
 KARIN DEW  
 MARILYN TASSO  
 RICK SHERRILL  
 PATTI SMALL  
 RHONDA SUPER  
 PATSY BOUGE  
 ROBIN TONCRE  
 ARNIE SMITH  
 MICHAEL ZACK  
 LILLIE ROBERTSON  
 SHARON HAYS  
 ADRIANNA BERNARD  
 REBECCA MILGROM  
 ROBERT ROMAN

## GAME SHOW/LAS VEGAS UNIT

Unit Production Manager  
 1st Assistant Director  
 2nd Assistant Director  
 Costumes For Las Vegas Sequence Designed By PETE MENEFEE  
 Choreography For The Las Vegas Number By PATRICIA BIRCH  
 Las Vegas/Game Show Sets Designed By DANIEL A. LOMINO  
 Script Supervisor JULIE PITKANEN  
 Production Coordinator MARY COURTNEY  
 Camera Operator JOHN LEONETTI  
 1st Assistant Cameramen MIKE WELDON  
 2nd Assistant Cameraman BOB STRADLING  
 DOUG BEALE

(more)

|                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Still Photographer            | ROBBIE ROBINSON           |
| Sound Mixers                  | JACQUES NOSCO             |
|                               | RON JUDKINS               |
| Boom Operators                | BOB JACKSON               |
|                               | TERRY EMERSON             |
| Key Grip                      | JOHN LINDER               |
| Chief Lighting Technicians    | GARY TANDROW              |
| Property Master               | JIM ZEMANSKY              |
| Special Effects Supervisor    | RICH RATLIFF              |
| Post-Production Supervisor    | DOROTHY J. BAILEY         |
| Additional Film Editors       | JERE HUGGINS              |
|                               | MICHAEL S. MURPHY         |
| Assistant Editors             | STEVEN ROSENBLUM          |
|                               | NEIL KIRK                 |
| Apprentice Editor             | BENJAMIN CHULAY           |
| ADR Group Coordinator         | LYNN ABROMS               |
| Negative Cutter               | LEIGH FRENCH              |
| Music Supervision             | GLENN SUFFERN             |
| Music Clearances By           | RON GERTZ                 |
| Supervising Music Editor      | THE CLEARING HOUSE, LTD   |
| Music Editing                 | JIM HARRISON              |
| Re-Recording Facility         | SEGUE MUSIC               |
| Re-Cording Mixers             | BUENA VISTA SOUND STUDIOS |
|                               | JIM COOK, C.A.S.          |
| Visual Effects Supervisor     | NICK ALPHIN, C.A.S.       |
| Visual Effects Produced By    | ROBERT L. HARMAN, C.A.S.  |
| Optical Effects Supervisor    | PETER DONEN               |
| Animation Supervisor          | APOGEE PRODUCTIONS, INC.  |
| Animators                     | R. WILLIAM DORNEY         |
|                               | CLINT COLVER              |
| Animation Assistant           | KATHLEEN QUAIFE-HODGE     |
|                               | HARRY MOREAU              |
| Optical Lineup                | JOHN SHOURT               |
| Optical Camera                | STEPHANIE LESSNER         |
| Post Production Sound Editing | MARTI JULIAN              |
| Supervisor                    | NICK G. LINARDOS          |
| Sound Designer                | JERRY POOLER              |
| Sound Editors                 | SYNC-POP, INC.            |
|                               | JEFF CLARK                |
|                               | DAVID LEWIS YEWDALL       |
|                               | DWAYNE AVERY              |
|                               | DUNCAN JAMES BURNS        |

(more)

## Sound Editors (continued)

MICHAEL P. COOK  
ED F. FASSL  
ADAM JOHNSTON  
JAMES KOFORD  
JOSEPH O. SOROKIN  
KYLE WRIGHT

## Assistant Sound Editors

PATRICK BIETZ

GONZO

GRETCHEN THOMA

CHUCK C. SIMMONS

JERRY M. JACOBSON

GAIL CLARK

DUKE L. BROWN

CASEY TROUTMAN

KEVIN ROCKEY

MICHAEL LANGE

CFI

DAN MUSCARELLA

PACIFIC TITLE

KLASKY CSUPO, INC.

## Appretice Sound Editor

## Supervising ADR Editor

## ADR Editor

## Foley Editor

## Foley Steppers

## Second Unit Directed By

## Color By

## Color Timer

## Opticals By

## Main Title Design By

LENSES AND PANAFLEX CAMERA BY PANAVISION  
ULTRACAM CAMERA, LENSES AND EQUIPMENT PROVIDED BY LEONETTI  
CINE RENTALS

FILMED AT THE BURBANK STUDIOS  
BURBANK, CALIFORNIA & RALEIGH STUDIOS--HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

## Public Relations

MURRAY WEISSMAN  
TONY ANGELLOTTI

PUBLICITY COORDINATOR FOR  
QUEEN "B" PRODUCTIONS

JANIS GARDNER

"ELVIRA" AND "MISTRESS OF THE DARK" ARE THE TRADEMARKS OF QUEEN  
"B" PRODUCTION

PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH QUEEN "B" PRODUCTIONS

(more)

"I PUT A SPELL ON YOU"  
 Written By JAY HAWKINS  
 Performed By JOANNA ST. CLAIRE

"TUESDAY'S COME AND GONE"  
 Written By RON MC GOWAN &  
 EDWINA TRAVIS-CHIN  
 Performed By PAMELA MILLER

"CHICKEN FRIED STEAK"  
 Written & Performed By  
 GARY AUSTIN

"NEW WORLD SYMPHONY"  
 Written By ANTON DVORAK  
 Performed By PRO MUSICA  
 SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
 Conducted By HANS-JURGEN WALTER

"TOWN WITHOUT PITY"  
 Written By DMITRI TIOMKIN  
 and NED WASHINGTON  
 Performed By JESS HARNESS

"MANIAC"  
 Written By ANTON DVORAK  
 Performed By PRO MUSIC  
 SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
 Conducted By HANS-JURGEN WALTER

"WEEPING LIKE A WILLOW"  
 Written By DAN SLIDER

"SHOUT"

"ELVIRA'S THEME"  
 Written By Mark Whetney Pierosn

Written By O'KELLEY ISLEY,  
 RONALD ISLEY & RUDOLPH ISLEY  
 Performed By RICK CERSHAW

"ONCE BITTEN, TWICE SHY"  
 Written By LORI CHACKO & JOEY BALIN  
 Performed By LORI CHACKO  
 Courtesy Of Polygram Special Projects,  
 A Division of Polygram Records, Inc.

DOLBY®

SPECIAL THANKS TO  
 THE NBC PRODUCTION STAFF

RUNNING TIME: 96 MINUTES

MPAA: PG-13

**"ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK"**  
**A RECIPE FOR COMEDY**

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" is a fast-paced, off-center comedy-spoof whose star/heroine, Elvira (Cassandra Peterson), riotously takes off on everything from the horror genre to small town thinking to current movie trends to her own sexy screen persona. Elvira's first theatrical feature is a sure-fire recipe for comedy that combines the gourmet ingredients of satire, outrageous visual humor, lively double entendres and a host of contemporary comedic talent, including creative forces behind "Saturday Night Live" and The Groundlings improvisational comedy troupe.

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures which opens nationally September 30, draws its offbeat comedic punch from a passionate marriage of young, avant-garde creative talent who have created trends and inspired much imitation. Mixing the comedic skills and innovations of New York's "Saturday Night Live" and Los Angeles's The Groundlings improvisational theater group, the film boasts 6 actors (and two screen writers, including Cassandra Peterson) who are former Groundlings, and the director of Rodney Dangerfield's "Easy Money" (James Signorelli) as its  
(more)

director. In addition, the executive producer, Michael Rachmil, has produced the comedies "Roxanne," starring Steve Martin, and "Punchline," starring Sally Field and Tom Hanks.

As might be expected, "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" showcases Elvira's wicked wit and blazing double entendres, delivered as only Elvira, the 1980's answer to Mae West, can deliver them. Adding to this is an ideal mix of creative talent: actors Edie McClurg ("Valerie's Family"), perfectly cast as the town curmudgeon; Jeff Conaway ("Taxi"), cast against type as the bumbling henchman; Daniel Greene ("Falcon Crest"), playing a reluctant suitor; W. Morgan Sheppard ("Max Headroom"), channeling his Shakespearean training into one determined but oft-foiled ghoul; and brassy Susan Kellermann ("Beetlejuice," "Secret of My Success"), giving "rival" a funny name.

Credit many people for bringing "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" to the screen, starting, of course, with Cassandra Peterson, director Signorelli, and producers Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson. Not coincidentally, however, it was talent chief Joel Thurm who cornered NBC's Brandon Tartikoff and recommended NBC consider Elvira for a TV series. Tartikoff liked Elvira and was receptive to the series idea. Then NBC became involved in theatrical ventures. Believing that TV might necessarily dilute the Elvira spice, Cassandra and her producers instead developed their script for the big screen. When NBC began producing its own theatrical films ("Square Dance," "Satisfaction"), Tartikoff reapproached Cassandra, and, with New World Pictures on board to distribute, the film was underway.

(more)

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" is a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures. Starring are Cassandra Peterson, Edie McClurg, Jeff Conaway, W. Morgan Sheppard, Daniel Greene, and Susan Kellermann. James Signorelli directs from an original screenplay by Sam Egan, John Paragon and Cassandra Peterson. Executive producer is Michael Rachmil, producers are Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson, supervising producer is Joel Thurman.

\* \* \*

**"ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK"**

**SYNOPSIS**

**(not for publication)**

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" opens with Elvira (CASSANDRA PETERSON) hosting her campy series of horror films at a run-down Los Angeles TV station. After an altercation with the station's new owner, she quits her job, under the impression that she has a deal for her own show in Las Vegas. It seems, however, that her ineffectual agent, Manny Herman (CHARLIE WOOLF), neglected to tell her she has to come up with her own seed money--\$50,000! A telegram suddenly arrives--her elderly great aunt Morgana Talbot has kicked the bucket and has left Elvira an unspecified inheritance. All she has to do is show up at the reading of the will, and Vegas here she comes!

Dreaming of riches, Elvira drives cross country in her customized "Macabremobile"--a '58 T-Bird complete with leopard skin upholstery, spider-web grill, barbed-wire license-plate holders and other such adornments--toward her great-aunt's hometown, Fallwell, Massachusetts. Rumbling into town, Elvira, dressed as always in her mile-high bouffant; white-as-a-ghost make-up and a clinging black dress showing enough cleavage to hold a flag pole, turns the town on its collective ear. Teens Randy (KRIS KAMM), Sean (SCOTT MORRIS) and Bo (IRA HEIDEN) are happily awestruck. However, the town's morality brigade, including Chastity Pariah  
(more)

(EDIE McCLURG), self-appointed leader, and motel owner Mrs. Meeker (PAT CRAWFORD BROWN) are dumbstruck. Mrs. Meeker's granddaughter, Robin (ELLEN DUNNING), is thrilled by Elvira and obligingly directs her to Fallwell's one and only hot spot, Patty's Tidy Bowl Lanes, a bowling alley run by self-inflated, top-heavy Patty Alderson (SUSAN KELLERMANN). Patty lusts after Bob Redding (DANIEL GREENE), a naive, handsome hunk oblivious both to his charms and Patty's sex drive.

Elvira soon has eyes for Bob, too. When two yokels, Travis (JEFF CONAWAY) and Billy (FRANK COLLISON) try to manhandle Elvira in the bowling alley, Bob dispatches them, but doesn't pick up on Elvira's generous offer to extend the evening.

The next day Elvira learns that her inheritance consists of an old, rundown house, a poodle named Algonquin and cryptic book of "recipes." Her ominous, creepy great-uncle Vincent Talbot (W. W. MORGAN SHEPPARD) nearly erupts upon learning he's been purposely left out of the will. He informs his thugs, Travis and Billy, that it's the book he really wants and subsequently offers Elvira \$50 for it. She accepts and they arrange to meet later.

Alone at "home," Elvira immediately redesigns the poodle, giving it a day-glow pink mohawk, a studded harness, miniature metal skull jewelry and a new nick-name, Gonk. Seeming to somehow sense Vincent's ulterior motives, Gonk finds and hides the recipe book. When Vincent arrives it's nowhere to be found and he storms off full of ire.

Broke and with no one interested in buying her house, Elvira is stuck in Fallwell. Manny pressures her to raise the money for Vegas.  
(more)

so she begins applying for jobs. Bob reveals that the movie theater he owns is doing poorly, so Elvira suggests that Bob show old, terrible horror movies while she does her campy schtick before a live audience. The show (which all the town's teenagers attend against both their parents' wishes and the school principal's orders) goes well until Patty sabotages it by dousing Elvira with black tar and feathers.

At home later with Bob, Elvira stumbles on the book Gonk had hidden and innocently uses a recipe to make them dinner. Dinner unexpectedly comes to life as a hideous, screaming gremlin. It seems the "recipes" are really potions and incantations. In an old family trunk in the attic she and Bob discover evidence of Elvira's heritage: that her mother was the first Mistress of the Dark whose marriage to a mortal paved the way for covetous uncle Vincent to usurp her dominion.

The next day at Fallwell's 34th Annual Morality Club Picnic, Elvira serves up another casserole, hoping another monster will pop out, thus wreaking her revenge on Patty and Chastity. Having changed the ingredients slightly, however, the casserole instead has an aphrodisiac effect, causing the repressed townsfolk to rub food on one another and lick it off, and other such decadent uses of picnic fare.

Vincent deduces Elvira has learned the power of the recipe book and the next day prompts the embarrassed townsfolk to jail her on witchcraft charges. Vincent then retrieves the book. From jail, Elvira and Gonk see the town preparing to burn them at the stake. Gonk then changes into a rat and returns home where Bob is held  
(more)

hostage by Vincent's thugs. Turning himself next from a rat into a large Rottweiler, Gonk frees Bob and they hurry to save Elvira. But they can do nothing as the fire surrounds her. Elvira suddenly remembers her mystical ring and uses it to call up rain which extinguishes the fire.

Just then a much transformed, demonic Vincent scatters the crowd by randomly casting evil spells. He confronts Elvira and the two engage in "High-Noon" witchy warfare at a graveyard, he using his powers and Elvira her ring. Ultimately Vincent is vanquished but not before Elvira's house and book are destroyed. Later, the guilt-ridden townsfolk apologize to Elvira, who is now really broke.

Ironically it is Vincent, now dead and gone, who finances Elvira's Vegas act. As his only heir, she inherits his estate and uses the bucks to put together one of the wackiest Vegas routines imaginable--which, of course, scores a mammoth hit there. Elvira, in the end, is the star we knew her to be all along!

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" is a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release September 30 by New World Pictures. Starring are Cassandra Peterson, Edie McClurg, Jeff Conaway, W. Morgan Sheppard, Daniel Greene, and Susan Kellermann. James Signorelli directs from an original screenplay by Sam Egan, John Paragon and Cassandra Peterson. Executive producer is Michael Rachmil, producers are Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson, supervising producer is Joel Thurm.

\* \* \*

## **"ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK" PRODUCTION NOTES**

### **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a comedy with unbridled, non-stop fun, stars the sultry hostess of TV horror movies as she's never been seen before. In her first theatrical film, Elvira's bizarre lifestyle and her outrageous wit shock the stuffy elders of a small New England town but happily excite the young people who help her claim the inheritance she needs to finance her dream -- a starring Las Vegas act, Elvira style.

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," the theatrical feature from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release September 30 by New World Pictures, is a film that just had to be made. From the start, when Elvira (created and portrayed by actress-writer Cassandra Peterson) burst on the Los Angeles scene via her "Movie Macabre" series of televised bad horror films in 1981, her fans clamored for a full length Elvira comedy-adventure feature. After "Movie Macabre" became nationally syndicated, the demand became too strong to ignore.

Ultimately, Cassandra joined with actor-writer John Paragon and writer-producer Sam Egan in scripting Elvira's first motion picture. NBC Productions and Cassandra's own Queen "B" Productions then set the creative team, including director James Signorelli ("Easy Money"), producers Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson, executive

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producer Michael Rachmil ("Roxanne," "Punchline"), supervising producer Joel Thurm, and the cast, including Edie McClurg, Daniel Greene, Jeff Conaway, W. Morgan Sheppard and Susan Kellermann. Production began January 20, 1988, in Los Angeles.

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" mixes the wisecracking wit of the slinky, sexy Elvira--playing herself as a down-on-her-luck TV hostess of horrible horror movies --with the straight-laced attitudes of a small New England town. Arriving in Fallwell, Mass. to collect an inheritance left by her late aunt Morgana Talbot, Elvira turns the quiet little hamlet on its ear. Seeing her, dressed as always in her mile-high bouffant, white-as-a-ghost make-up and a clinging black dress showing enough cleavage to hold a flag pole, the town's teens are happily awestruck, but the repressed denizens are numbed and dumbstruck. Elvira's presence is anathema as well to her Uncle Vincent, who believed himself to be Morgana's only heir. Their efforts to get rid of our spunky heroine are formidable, but are they any match for the foremost Mistress of the Dark?

Filming took place over eight weeks on various sound stages and locations in the Southern California area. In addition to the New England backlot set at The Burbank Studios and various interior sound stages, the "Elvira" locations included the Montrose Lanes bowling alley in Montrose, California, which served as Patti's Tidy Bowl Lanes, scene of Elvira's first confrontation with bad guys Travis (Jeff Conaway) and Bill (Frank Collison); the old, charming Mayfair Theater in Santa Monica, California, scene of Elvira's midnight show for the Fallwell teenagers; and in more remote Agua Dulce, California,

an old gas station which is destroyed by the black luck that follows Elvira on her sojourn.

One particular challenge in filming "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," according to director Signorelli and production designer John DeCuir, Jr., was designing the color schemes to effectively juxtapose "the little black silhouette" of Elvira against the straight-laced, many-hued world of Fallwell, actually the backlot of The Burbank Studios. Part of the solution, Signorelli says, was to tone down her surroundings and avoid creating great color contrasts. Says Signorelli, "Your eye naturally goes to her anyway, so we knew we had to tone things down to affect a more even blend of colors and images."

Designer DeCuir, Jr., whose other supernatural comedy assignments include "Ghostbusters" and "Fright Night," adds that the reality has to be disengaged just enough so that the comedic Elvira character plays against a background that isn't too far, but far enough out of sync to create the right level of visual fun. "We created around her a reality disengaged just enough so that this wild, beautiful, sexy character is just comfortable enough to provide, by contrast, some visual fun. We found that colors, of her co-stars' costumes, of the furniture and other art direction needed to be selected very carefully in order to create a certain veracity to her environment. Granted the reality is pushed, but we're playing the comedy against fairly realistic backgrounds in order to pull reality in closer to her character."

**Visual Comedic Elements**

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" boasts many unusual and comedic visual elements other than the uniquely costumed, voluptuous Elvira herself. One of the most unusual of these is Elvira's mode of transportation, the "Macabremobile," a customized 1958 black convertible T-Bird that features the finest in eccentric styling, including "leopard skin" upholstery, a shiny silver spider web custom front grill, license plate that reads "KICKASS," big white wall tires, hub caps sporting silver skull and cross bones on rotating ball bearings, barbed wire surrounding the license plates as well as the rear view mirror, a garlic garland hanging from the mirror, a miniature grim reaper statue mounted on the dash, a solid chain steering wheel with a pentagram and skull and cross bones in its center, metal skulls and pointed studs dotting the interior and dash, a skull knob on the gear shift and a large hood ornament of a buxom woman (no relation).

Another bizarre fixture in the film is Elvira's dog Algonquin, Gonk for short. Gonk, part of her inheritance, used to be a poodle, that is, until Elvira got a hold of him. Since she hates poodles, at least ones that look like poodles, she immediately takes up a pair of shears and various hair dyes and "reinvents" him. Once white and fluffy, Gonk is transformed into a crazily trimmed punk poodle, sporting a shocking pink dayglow mohawk, an earring dangling from one black dyed ear, studded leather anklets and collar.

Elvira's Victorian house is yet one more visual treat in this film that offers one strange sight after another. Wanting to spruce up her new home once she is stuck in Fallwell, Elvira grabs whatever cans of paint that she can find around the house and hands paint brushes out to eager neighborhood kids anxious to help out their newest, and most gorgeous resident. The result horrifies her neighbors but delights her and the kids.

#### **Special Effects**

Although a comedy, the writers of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" had always intended the film to include some sensational special effects, most of which would play for laughs. Three special effects teams worked with director James Signorelli in designing the stunts, opticals and creature tricks that reflect the most advanced levels of screen magic. As the script called for truly believeable pyrotechnics, special effects coordinator Dennis Dion, who specializes in this area, was brought in to execute the five planned scenes that required fire and explosives.

Dion, who has worked on "Taps," "Karate Kid II," "The Osterman Weekend" and "Murphy's Romance," to name a few, worked with Signorelli in planning and staging the potentially treacherous "burning" of Elvira at the stake; the torching of Elvira's house; the battle sequence between Elvira and Uncle Vincent (which involved rockets), the exploding of a gas station, and the "mining" of a cemetery to effect exploding gravestones.

Of these effects and stunts, Dion says, the burning at the stake proved to be the biggest challenge. The scene took five days to shoot, involved hundreds of extras wielding burning torches, lightning bolts

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cracking across the sky, rain jets pouring overhead and real fire burning at the feet of the film's star. Despite the obvious peril, Cassandra was never in any real danger, Dion says. "But," he adds, "it couldn't have been too comfortable." Cassandra herself spent three hours at a time tied to the stake, with heat from the nearby flames occasionally melting the hair of her wig. About this decidedly unglamorous scene Cassandra jokes, "As a co-writer, I have only myself to blame. I could have written myself into a scene on the beach in France, but NO!!!"

(Cassandra wrote herself into additional arduous scenes, not the least of which required tens of gallons of black paint and bushels of feathers to be dumped on her from high overhead. The scene, which takes place during her big "Flashdance"- type performance at the movie theater, was shot only once. For this Cassandra and the entire crew were grateful, as donning her costume itself takes more than two hours and removing the paint and feathers took several more.)

For the more personal, physical special effects Signorelli turned to miniature, stop motion animation and puppetry master, Doug Beswick, who served as special make-up effects supervisor. Beswick, whose credits include "Beetlejuice," "The Terminator," "The Three Amigos," "Aliens" and "Nightmare On Elm Street III," worked with special effects make-up artist Steve Laporte in creating and animating a monster that pops out of a kitchen pot, a realistic crawling hand with a mind of its own, and the three-stage warlock make-up worn by W. Morgan Sheppard. Sheppard's horrific make-up, with its sundry moving appliances and levels of "skin," took up to

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four hours per day to apply. The various stages serve to create the illusion of an ongoing transformation.

Rounding out the superb special effects trio was Peter Donen, whose more than 100 film credits include "Gremlins," "Superman," "Altered States," and "Outland." Donen's work, for the most part, took place during post-production. His efforts go toward creating the sparkling optical effects that will sizzle on screen--the lightning striking objects, the whiz of warlock bolts of energy, the magical transformations of Gonk into his other forms.

### The Groundlings

Before Cassandra Peterson became Elvira, she had been a performer at Los Angeles's famed The Groundling Theater, a troupe of talented improvisational comedians in the tradition of The Second City in Chicago. There she honed her comedic talents, performing routines and assuming characters she created along with a host of young talent that has gone on to find success in other areas.

Cassandra worked with Paul Reubens (Pee Wee Herman), Jon Lovitz, Phil Hartman and Laraine Newman of "Saturday Night Live," Edie McClurg, John Paragon, and many, many others.

Moving on to "Movie Macabre," other Elvira ventures and ultimately "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," Cassandra has continued to work with her early co-stars. In fact, 6 other Groundlings have participated in the film in one way or another. They are: John Paragon, who co-wrote the screenplay and played a small part as a witless gas station attendant; Edie McClurg who plays the outraged town puritan, Chastity Pariah; Tress McNeil, the no nonsense newscaster; Deryl Carroll, Charlie in the bowling alley; Joey Arias,

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who plays a psychopathic hitchhiker, and Lynne Stewart portrays a waitress in Fallwell.

### LAS VEGAS OR BUST

The inclusion of the "Las Vegas act" in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" brings Cassandra Peterson's career full circle. Las Vegas, which figures prominently in the film, has played an important part in Cassandra's personal and professional life. Another film, "Viva Las Vegas," starring Cassandra's idol Ann-Margret (also a red haired actress-dancer-singer) and her soon-to-be friend, Elvis Presley, convinced the young Manhattan, Kansas girl that she wanted to be an actress.

Then at age 17, Cassandra herself began working as a Las Vegas dancer at the Dunes hotel, thus becoming the youngest showgirl in the town's history at that time. Over and above that thrill, she met the town's biggest star, Elvis Presley. Ironically, his friendship and sage advice prompted her to pursue a singing career and therefore leave Las Vegas.

Now, years later, Cassandra (Aka Elvira) is back in town! Throughout the film Elvira aspires to a Las Vegas act of her own, and, after many bizarre events, she finally gets her wish. As presented in the film, the Las Vegas act is a glitzy, appropriately offbeat number complete with one of the wildest cape and headdress showgirl costume ever worn, a huge spider web backdrop with a chorus line of muscle men writhing about, and props that included live tarantulas Elvira had to caress in the palms of her hands, plus an original song (produced by Todd Rundgren) and unique choreography.

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From childhood dreams to grown up fantasy, Las Vegas has remained a colorful part in Cassandra's life. A part she now shares with that town's newest star, Elvira, Mistress of the Dark.

### **Elvira "Bonanza"**

Since the "birth" of Elvira, more than 35,000 fans have aligned into a devout, official fan club. To satisfy their many requests and deviant desires, a line of Elvira merchandising items have been created, spawning a bonanza that is self-perpetuating and world wide. Among the many colorful items are records, greeting cards, posters, T-shirts, comic books, buttons, key chains, make-up, wigs, costumes and a home video line of horror films, Thriller Video. The future promises a Saturday morning animated television series and international syndication of "Movie Macabre."

Satiric, outrageous comedy, an array of visual treats and a touch of the supernatural are Elvira trademarks--and key ingredients in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark." Elvira's legion of fans and the many certain converts will have their collective dreams fulfilled with the release of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark": they will see Elvira as they have never seen her before.

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" is a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures. Starring are Cassandra Peterson, Edie McClurg, Jeff Conaway, W. Morgan Sheppard, Daniel Greene, and Susan Kellermann. James Signorelli directs from an original screenplay by Sam Egan, John Paragon and Cassandra Peterson. Executive producer is Michael Rachmil, producers are Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson, supervising producer is Joel Thurm.

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## ABOUT THE CAST

### ELVIRA/CASSANDRA PETERSON Biography

The star of "Elvira Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures, is clearly one of the most original and outrageous characters in popular culture today. A cross among Mae West, Vincent Price and alter-ego, actress-writer Cassandra Peterson, Elvira blends a sexy, wicked wit and classic horror style into a one-woman international entertainment conglomerate, encompassing television, records, videos and now feature films.

Seductively garbed in a slinky, plunging black dress, Elvira burst onto the Los Angeles scene late in 1981 as hostess of KHJ-TV's "Movie Macabre." A twice weekly televised series of truly bad horror films, "Movie Macabre" provided Elvira/Cassandra with a showcase for her special brand of mocking satire and tacky double entendres, not to mention her traffic-stopping body.

During the last seven years on television Elvira has built a massive following of loyal fans. (The show began being nationally syndicated in 1982.) Her fame then started spilling over international borders. Ultimately, she became such a celebrated figure and merchandising bonanza that the call for a theatrical motion picture was too loud for the film industry to ignore. At the 1987 Cannes Film Festival, where she announced her plans for "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," Elvira caused a two-hour traffic jam as the world press and international film buyers fought for a glimpse of her.

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"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a comedy with unbridled, non-stop fun, stars the sultry hostess of TV horror movies as she's never been seen before. In her first theatrical film, Elvira's bizarre lifestyle and her outrageous wit shock the stuffy elders of a small New England town but happily excite the young people who help her claim the inheritance she needs to finance her dream -- a starring Las Vegas act, Elvira style.

In her debut motion picture Elvira plays a down-on-her-luck TV hostess of horrible horror movies hoping to take her act to Las Vegas. Her dream is sidetracked when she loses her job and then finds she must go to a straight-laced New England town to collect an inheritance from a mysterious aunt. When Elvira casts her spell over the sedate little town the results are no less than bewitching!

Elvira's alter ego, Cassandra Peterson, was born in Manhattan, Kansas and raised in Colorado Springs, Colorado where she often raided her mother's small costume shop in order to stage elaborate song and dance extravaganzas. Family and friends delighted in the young girl's dead-on musical impressions of her idol, Ann-Margret.

At 17, Cassandra vacationed in Las Vegas with her parents. During a show at the Dunes Hotel, the stage manager approached her and asked if she would agree to audition as a dancer. She was offered a job, but her parents wisely brought her back to Colorado to finish high school. She returned to Las Vegas after graduation and became a featured dancer at the Dunes and, still only 17, the youngest showgirl in town.

A year later Elvis Presley spotted Cassandra and encouraged her to expand her career. She took his advice and soon traveled to Europe where she toured extensively through Italy as the lead singer for a rock group.

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Having become fluent in Italian, she settled in Rome where director Federico Fellini, enchanted by her looks, cast her in several vignettes in "Fellini's Roma."

Cassandra returned to the U.S. where she sang and danced on the Playboy Club circuit. She then created her own nightclub revue, Mama's Boys, which played very successfully across the country. She decided to try Hollywood and once there joined The Groundlings, L.A.'s foremost improvisational comedy group. Here she honed her comedic skills as an actress and writer. During this time, she performed with Paul Reubens (Pee Wee Herman), John Paragon, co-writer of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," Phil Hartman and Jon Lovitz of "Saturday Night Live." She also won acting roles in such television series as "Happy Days," "CHiPS," "Fantasy Island," "House Calls," "Alice," "St. Elsewhere" and the feature films, "Cheech and Chong's Next Movie," "Jekyll and Hyde--Together Again," "The Sting II" and "Stroker Ace."

"I was your typical struggling actress," she recalls. "I went to every tryout, took every acting, dancing and singing class I could. As you can see, I worked my brains out."

Then in the fall of 1981 Cassandra received the break every performer dreams of. She won the role of Elvira, the wise-cracking hostess of the horror film series "Movie Macabre," broadcast locally in Los Angeles. Viewer response was overwhelming and immediate. A fan club sprang up overnight, groups pleaded for her personal appearances; in short, she became an instant celebrity. Soon after, the show was nationally syndicated and is currently seen in over 65% of the country. Appearances soon followed on "The Tonight Show," "Saturday Night Live," "Friday Night Videos," MTV, "Today," "CBS Morning News," "Entertainment Tonight," "The

Fall Guy," Cable News Network, "Real People," a Bob Hope Special, "Solid Gold," and many others as the media and Elvira began a long-standing romance.

Her official fan club presently numbers more than 35,000 members nationwide and is growing daily. Her popularity has spawned an Elvira merchandising bonanza, including records, greeting cards, posters, t-shirts, comic books, buttons, key chains, make-up, wigs, costumes and a home video line of horror films, Thriller Video. Forthcoming plans also include a Saturday morning animated television series and international syndication of "Movie Macabre."

With the explosion of the Elvira character, Cassandra Peterson established herself as a singular comedienne who balances her good looks with intelligence and wit. Rarely has a woman in this arena succeeded as both a sex symbol and a "feminist." It is in the character of Elvira, Mistress of the Dark, that Cassandra ultimately melds her many talents by delivering an intriguing persona which consistently wins the imagination and hearts of her fans.

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### **EDIE MCCLURG**

#### **Biography**

Diminutive, cupie-doll-voiced comedienne Edie McClurg has fashioned a thriving acting career out of some of the most offbeat characterizations performed in movies and television today. Well known as Mrs. Poole in the popular NBC-TV series, "Valerie's Family," Edie has created and portrayed countless eccentric, but always

formidable, ladies, beginning with her days in improvisational theater.

Edie entered the entertainment business from radio news, where she started in Kansas City, MO. as a newswoman and documentary producer at KCUR-FM. While vacationing in San Francisco in 1975, she was invited to join her brother in the Pitschel Players improv group and moved with the group to Los Angeles in 1976. Shortly thereafter, she began performing with Los Angeles's famed improv group, The Groundlings, which is where she met Cassandra Peterson (Elvira).

Edie landed her first film role, in Brian DePalma's "Carrie," almost immediately. Thereafter she began working constantly in films and on television. Her film roles include "Back To School," "Eating Raoul," and a quartet of John Hughes pictures, "She's Having A Baby," "Planes, Trains and Automobiles," "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," and "Mr. Mom." Her television appearances include "The Richard Pryor Show," "WKRP In Cincinnati," "Harper Valley PTA," and many, many others.

Of Chastity Pariah, one of Elvira's chief adversaries in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures, Edie says "Chastity is like Tipper Gore, who always thinks she's right. She represses any tendency toward fun. If it's fun, it must be wrong. Deep down she's so jealous of Elvira that she could just spit!"

A collector of photos featuring people with their pets, Edie asks anyone to send her their personal photos taken with their favorite pet. She thanks you in advance.

**DANIEL GREENE****Bob Redding**

Elvira's handsome, naive love interest, Bob Redding, as played by actor Daniel Greene in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures, exudes a gentleness that belies his 6'3", 195-pound he-man frame. For that reason Bob is more like Daniel than the many "macho men" he often portrays in films and television.

"This film is wild stuff," Daniel says, "and I love it! Going for laughs is a nice change for me after several macho "Rocky," "Rambo" types of roles. I have the chance to show another side of my personality."

Some of Daniel's rugged type roles include those in the recently completed feature films "Skeleton Coast," with Ernest Borgnine, Oliver Reed and Robert Vaughn, in which Daniel plays a mercenary squad leader on a rescue mission, and "The Opponent," also starring Borgnine, in which Daniel plays a boxer vying for the heavyweight title. Both films are for release in 1988. In fact, 1988 is Daniel's year, with two additional motion pictures also slated for release: "Arthur On the Rocks," in which he plays an aerobics instructor for Geraldine Fitzgerald, and "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark." Previous film roles include "Weekend Warriors" and "Hands of Steel," both of which took advantage of Daniel's commanding and physical presence.

That unmistakable screen presence led to Daniel's initial work in television commercials and series beginning in 1980. Many guest

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starring roles in such series as "Dynasty," "Three's Company," "The A-Team," and "Night Court," brought Daniel to the attention of the producers of CBS-TV's "Falcon Crest," and he was cast as truck driver Dwayne Cooley during the 1985-86 season. It proved to be Daniel's big break and led to his many subsequent film and TV roles.

Born and raised in Miami, Florida, Daniel attended and played football for Florida State University. He earned his degree in International Affairs, but opted instead to follow the path of two other notable athletic FSU students-turned-Hollywood actors--Burt Reynolds and Robert Urich.

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### **JEFF CONAWAY**

#### **Biography**

Jeff Conaway portrays the ineffectual henchman Travis in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark." Best known for his role as Bobby Wheeler on the award-winning "Taxi" series, Conaway has accumulated myriad film, television and stage credits since his Broadway stage debut at age ten in "All The Way Home," starring Colleen Dewhurst and Lillian Gish for director Arthur Penn.

At age eleven, he was touring the country in "Critics Choice," and followed with still other plays, commercials and television appearances. At 15 he was the lead singer-guitarist with a popular New York-based rock group, "3 1/2," and mixed in touring, recording, stage and television work for several years. In 1972, he replaced Barry Bostwick in the then only two week old play "Grease," which, once on Broadway, became a huge hit. Following a 2 1/2 year

tour with the play, he went to California where he won many roles on hit television shows as well as in feature films ("The Eagle Has Landed," "Pete's Dragon" and "I Never Promised You A Rose Garden") and films for television.

"Grease" the movie followed. Its tremendous success led to his role in *Taxi*, which lasted three years. Since leaving the show Conaway has appeared in dozens of plays, including "Foxfire," "California Suite" and "Run For Your Wife," and films for television, including "Bay Coven," "Dirty Dozen IV," and the series "Berrengers."

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### **W. MORGAN SHEPPARD**

#### **Biography**

Noted English actor W. Morgan Sheppard portrays Elvira's devilish, plotting Uncle Vincent in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release September 30 by New World Pictures. Recently seen as Blank Reg in the "Max Headroom" series, Morgan began his acting career at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, which he attended on a scholarship. Subsequently, he appeared in repertory theaters and on London's West End before joining the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1963, remaining with them for 12 years. On Broadway Morgan played the lead in "Marat/Sade" as well as the role of Craigin in "Sherlock Holmes."

His films include "The Duellists," "The Elephant Man," "The Sea Wolves," "The Keep," "Lady Jane," and "Doctor and The Devils." His television credits include "Rebecca," "The Flame Trees of Thika,"

"Shogun," "Masada," "A.D.," "Camille," and the original British "Max Headroom."

**SUSAN KELLERMANN**

**Biography**

New York-based actress Susan Kellermann, who plays the devious, seemingly buxom bowling alley queen, Patty, was cast in her first major role, that of Latka's mother in NBC-TV's "Taxi," by Joel Thurman, who eleven years later served as supervising producer of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures. Thurman, who cast the film, also served as its Supervising Producer.

But Susan almost didn't get the role of Patty, the vampish proprietor of Patty's Tidy Bowl Lanes bowling alley. Patty, Elvira's buxom chief (female) nemesis and the former hottest date in town, is "exposed" in the end to be flat chested, having appeared to have been stacked due only to her generous use of bra stuffers. Susan Kellermann, however, is anything but flat chested. Happy with Susan in the role, the producers elected instead to try to make the situation work. "They tried binding me with body wrap," Susan says. But that didn't do it. She is simply too ample. Using a body double became the only answer, an answer, Susan laughs, "I wouldn't mind people knowing about."

Susan started her career in New York while still a student of Sandy Meisner. Following her "Taxi" break she landed her first

Broadway play, "Last Licks," by Frank Gilroy. From there she segued into "Whose Life Is It Anyway?" with Mary Tyler Moore and "Lunch Hour," directed by Mike Nichols, on Broadway. During this time she traveled back and forth between New York and Los Angeles, where she filmed several movies for television, including "Fighter," starring Gregory Harrison.

Motion pictures Susan has also appeared in include "The Secret of My Success," starring Michael J. Fox, "Couch Trip," starring Dan Akroyd, and "Beetlejuice," starring Michael Keaton.

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## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **JAMES SIGNORELLI**

**(Director)**

James Signorelli, director of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release September 30 by New World Pictures, debuted as a feature film director with "Easy Money," starring Rodney Dangerfield. A member of Lorne Michaels' original creative team for "Saturday Night Live," he has continued to produce and direct the series' commercial parodies. In association with Lorne Michaels' Broadway Video production company, Signorelli also produced the "Simon and Garfunkel: Concert in Central Park" special for HBO; "Randy Newman at the Odeon" special for Showtime, and the music video for the Rolling Stones album, "Tatoo You." He also co-produced the two-hour

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prime time "Rolling Stone Magazine 20th Anniversary Special" for ABC.

Signorelli worked on a variety of avant-garde films in New York, including "Ciao Manhattan," starring Edie Sedgwick. In 1968, he traveled with Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign as director and cameraman for the filmed documentation. He then worked as documentary cameraman with Charles Guggenheim on Edward Kennedy's senatorial campaign as well as several other campaign films.

Signorelli first crossed over to commercial filmmaking when he served as director of photography on several feature and television films shot in New York in the early 1970's, including "Superfly," "Hell Up In Harlem," "Three the Hard Way," and "Black Caesar."

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**ERIC GARDNER and MARK PIERSON**

**(PRODUCERS)**

**ERIC GARDNER**

Producer Eric Gardner, co-manager of Elvira (Cassandra Peterson), along with partner Mark Pierson, has enjoyed a distinguished and successful career in the music industry. After graduating from Columbia University with a Masters Degree in playwriting (and winning the 1971 Shubert Award for one of his plays), Gardner founded Panacea Entertainment in 1973, then designed to coordinate worldwide concert tours for prominent rock bands, including The Jefferson Airplane, The Grateful Dead and Kiss. Soon after, Panacea began managing bands; his

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clients have included Todd Rundgren, Bill Wyman (of the Rolling Stones), Hot Tuna and Blue Oyster Cult. Gardner also began producing television and film projects for his clients, both short form music videos (more than 100 thus far) and longform concert and documentary programs (over 250 hours to date). He also served as Executive Producer for the 1983 made-for-video feature "Digital Dreams," starring Bill Wyman and James Coburn.

In 1983, Gardner joined forces with Mark Pierson in representing Elvira in all areas. With Pierson he has produced Elvira's Thriller Video line as well as her two six-hour MTV Halloween specials.

#### **MARK PIERSON**

Producer Mark Pierson co-manages Elvira (Cassandra Peterson) with partner Eric Gardner. He has been involved with the Elvira character from her genesis and has even written the "Elvira's Theme" music for the "Movie Macabre" television series. "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" is Pierson's first venture into theatrical filmmaking. He has previously co-produced Elvira's two MTV Halloween specials, directed the "Elvira's In Salem" 1988 special; executive produced Elvira's Thriller Video, the homevideo series she hosts; and will co-produce the upcoming Elvira hosted series for Network 10 in Australia. Pierson is also president of Elvira Merchandising, which handles the licensing of all Elvira merchandise. He also manages Joey Arias, who in addition to appearing in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," stars in two other 1988 theatrical releases, "Mondo New York" and in "Big Top Pee Wee."

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**MICHAEL RACHMIL****(Executive Producer)**

Michael Rachmil served as Executive Producer of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release September 30 by New World Pictures. During his 15 year career as a filmmaker, Rachmil has produced five theatrical motion pictures, associate produced or production managed eight others and has served as a production executive with three major independent production companies.

Films Rachmil has produced include "Roxanne," starring Steve Martin (Columbia), the forthcoming "Punchline," starring Sally Field and Tom Hanks (Columbia), "Runaway," starring Tom Selleck" (Tri-Star), and "Quicksilver," starring Kevin Bacon (Columbia). Other motion pictures Rachmil has served in a production capacity on are "Tom Horn," "Hanover Street," "Capricorn One," "Demon Seed," "Griffin Loves Phoenix," "The Virginia Hill Story," "Westworld," and "E.C.U."

Rachmil additionally was a producer with Michael Crichton's Constant C Productions and executive-in-charge of production for Film Finance Ltd. and Aspen Productions.

**JOEL THURM****(Supervising Producer)**

Joel Thurm served as Supervising Producer on "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures. Thurm, who is Vice President, Talent at NBC Entertainment, is one of the key executives on the Brandon Tartikoff team that propelled NBC from third to first place.

Thurm held several positions with various theatrical companies in New York prior to becoming producer David Merrick's casting director. He cast the original productions of "Play It Again, Sam," "Forty Carats," "Promises, Promises," "Child's Play" and "Hello, Dolly" (with Pearl Bailey). In Los Angeles he cast "Tommy," "Jesus Christ, Superstar" and "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

In Los Angeles, Thurm soon turned to television and features full time, serving at CBS in casting, at the Spelling-Goldberg organization in casting and at Paramount as executive in charge of talent development. Thurm cast "Taxi" at ABC and then came to NBC where he immediately matched relatively unknowns, such as Ted Danson, Shelly Long and Daniel J. Travanti, with their ultimate star-making vehicles.

Thurm also produced the movie for television, "Boy In the Plastic Bubble," starring John Travolta, and the "Angie" television series. Motion pictures cast by Thurm include "Airplane!," "Rocky Horror Picture Show," "Grease," and "Altered States."

#### OTHER CREDITS

Along with Cassandra Peterson, the **co-screenwriters** of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," are Cassandra's former Groundling co-star John Paragon (who has appeared in the features "Echo Park" and "Eating Raoul" and has been nominated for an Emmy for his writing on "Pee Wee's Playhouse") and writer/producer Sam Egan (who has produced 150 hours of prime-time television and written many award-winning television episodes and the features "Imagine--John Lennon," and "The Borrower"). **Production designer** John DeCuir, Jr., a graduate of USC's architectural school, has more than 20 years

of production design and art direction experience in motion pictures. He has also served as a project designer and design director for many entertainment centers and corporations. His film credits as a production designer include "Apt Pupil," "Top Gun," and "Fright Night," and, as an art director, "Ghostbusters," "The Quest," "Monsignore," and "Raise the Titanic." The spectacular and often humorous **special effects** created for the film sprung from three separate effects teams headed by **special effects coordinator** Dennis Dion ("Karate Kid II," "Murphy's Romance," "Taps"), **special make-up effects** wizard Doug Beswick ("Beetlejuice," "The Terminator," "Nightmare On Elm Street III," "Aliens"), and **visual effects supervisor** Peter Donen ("Gremlins," "Superman"). **Director of photography** duties were handled by (at time of writing undecided as to exact credits per production office)

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## FEATURES

### THE GROUNDLING CONNECTION

Los Angeles's famed improvisational comedic theater group, The Groundlings Theater, like Chicago's The Second City, has fostered some of the brightest and most original stars of the comedy world today. Among them, of course, Cassandra Peterson, the title star of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release September 30 by New World Pictures.

Cassandra, who started her showbusiness career in Los Angeles as a Groundling, has remained close and loyal to her former co-stars, who include Paul Reubens (Pee Wee Herman), Jon Lovitz, Laraine Neman and Phil Hartman of "Saturday Night Live," and many others. Six of Cassandra's former improv partners are, in fact, involved with her in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark." They are: Edie McClurg, who plays Mrs. Poole on NBC's "Valerie's Family," portrays Elvira's puritanical adversary, Chastity Pariah; John Paragon, co-screenwriter (along with Cassandra and Sam Egan) of the film, who also plays a small part as a witless gas station attendant; Tress McNeil, who portrays an impatient newscaster at the TV station that employs Elvira; Deryl Carroll, who plays Charlie, Patty's cohort; Joey Arias, who plays a psychopathic hitchhiker; and Lynne Stewart, who plays a waitress.

Originally, when Cassandra began her "Movie Macabre" series, she continued working with many of her former co-stars. John Paragon wrote

much of the original material and additionally played the recurring role of "the breather;" Pee Wee Herman, Phil Hartman and Laraine Newman, among other notable Groundlings, also made appearances on the show.

In her further ventures, Cassandra has remained true to her comedy roots and continues to work with her former stage partners. Aside from "Movie Macabre" and "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," she has teamed up with George McGrath, John Moody and Doug Cox on her nationally syndicated Halloween radio specials in recent years.

Who says you can't go home?

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**FOURTH GENERARTION MAKE-UP ARTIST  
PAMELA WESTMORE CONTINUES  
DISTINGUISHED FAMILY TRADITION**

Make-up artist Pamela Westmore is a vibrant part of the longest standing family tradition in Hollywood history. Beginning with her great-grandfather, George Westmore, the Westmores have been both pioneers and constants in the theatrical make-up arts.

Pamela, who at 27 is already a veteran make-up artist of eight years, served as chief make-up artist on "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures.

The Hollywood Westmore legacy began in 1917 when George, an expert wig maker and make-up artist, established the very first movie studio make-up department. In those early days George proved an unmatched innovator, creating some of the best and most memorable make-up designs of his day. The tradition continued in a remarkable succession, with all six of George's sons following in their father's footsteps. The Westmore brothers, Bud, Mont, Perc, Ern, Frank, and Wally (Pamela's grandfather), not only excelled but were extraordinary pioneers in their chosen field.

Each of the brothers headed a major studios make-up department at one time, creating, overseeing and implementing make-up and special make-up designs for practically every Hollywood star from the 1920's until 1985, when the last of the

brothers, Frank, passed away. The brothers, who had forged an unquestionable dynasty, also established the most famous of all make-up and beauty houses during the golden era of Hollywood. The House of Westmore was the plushiest and grandest of them all, with every major actress (and some actors) of the day listed as regular patrons.

Pamela and her cousins, Mont, Jr., Marvin and Michael Westmore (sons of Mont, Sr.), continue the Westmore legacy today, with Pamela representing the only Westmore woman ever in this field. But it wasn't Pamela's intention to follow the family. In fact, as a youth she really wasn't fully aware of just how esteemed and creative a family she had, as her father, who was discouraged by Wally from entering the business, moved from Los Angeles. Subsequently Pamela was born in Oakland, California, and grew up in Denver, Colorado and Phoenix, Arizona.

"I remember visiting my grandfather and seeing all those photos of big stars. But I didn't realize the magnitude of my family's impact until I started working in post production just out of high school," she says. High school for Pamela was in Orange County, California, 30 miles south of Los Angeles, where her immediate family settled during her teens. While in school, she first became aware of her affinity for the make-up arts.

"I noticed how poorly the make-up was done for a play at school," she says. "Just for fun, I offered to take over for that one play. I ended up doing every play thereafter and establishing a decent, semi-professional make-up department. But it was a hobby. I never thought of doing it seriously."

After graduation Pamela entered the film editing field, as had her older brother, Mark. It was during her work in post production that "I realized again how much make-up meant to me," she says.

Pamela was then offered a make-up position with a low budget production in 1979. "I still haven't been paid," she recalls. From that point on she has worked continuously, with each new film providing different challenges. Some of her assignments have included "Rambo," "Surrender," David Mamet's "House of Games" and "Things Change," and "Dominique and Eugene," starring Tom Hulce.

Considering Pamela's talent and enthusiasm for her work, it now seems certain there will be at least one hundred years of Westmores making Hollywood look good.

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**GONK: THE NEWEST STAR IN HOLLYWOOD**

He struts about the set, self-assured, even cocky. His shocking pink and black mohawk hairstyle and sly toothy grin, among other things, set him apart from the rest of the cast. At seven years old, he is a veteran of many films and television shows, a favorite of casting directors, actors and filmmakers alike. Unfazed by what seems like constant adoration (though one suspects he secretly laps it up), this newest and, literally, brightest Hollywood star is Binnie, the usually white male miniature poodle of many talents who is cast as Gonk (short for Algonquin), one third of Elvira's inheritance in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," the theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures.

Gonk looks the way he does (pink mohawk, black ear, metal studs on leather anklets, etc.), because Elvira can't stand poodles, at least ones that look like poodles. So she reinvents his looks in one swift, rebellious grooming session. The actual coloring and clipping of Binnie took at least a week, with much time spent experimenting with the "right" colors and jewelry. "He looks like Elvira's dog, don't you think?" Cassandra Peterson asks with a wink.

Gonk's part is one of the toughest in the film. Like veteran actor W. Morgan Sheppard (who portrays Uncle Vincent), his character undergoes several changes and alterations. Unlike Morgan, however, Gonk must change not only costumes, hair styles and color, he must change species. In the film, Gonk magically transforms

himself into a Rottweiller and then a rat, and back into a poodle. Imagine the identity problems this could cause for a lesser poodle!

Gonk's other acting feats in the film include hiding a book in a sofa, attacking the shins of assorted evildoers, snarling on cue, assuming full-on viciousness on cue, cuddling with Elvira, hiding one eye with his paw, jumping into the air from various objects, and spinning wildly in circles during his transformation scenes. This kind of activity is a lot to expect from any dog, professional or otherwise. But, according to Binnie's owner and trainer, Karen Dew, the clever canine is more than happy being a performer, especially when called upon to be aggressive.

"Binnie thinks he's tough. He has an aggressive personality. That's unusual for a poodle, and it makes him different from the others. When a part calls for a small dog to be aggressive, he always gets the part, especially for leg-attacking small dogs, that's his specialty. But," she adds, "one drawback is that he's done so many leg attacks that sometimes, not even waiting for his cue, he'll go for someone's leg. If they run, he loves it and pursues. If they look at him like he's a joke, he says 'aw, you're no fun,' and stops."

This behavior caused some humorous moments on the set of "Ruthless People," in which Binnie played Bette Midler's obnoxious pet with a hatred for husband Danny DeVito. "Binnie had to attack Danny so often," Karen says, "that he got to like it. After a while, all he had to do was hear Danny's voice anywhere and he would charge and attack him. Danny would see Binnie charging and would race away as fast as he could with Binnie tearing after him."

Binnie has played other major roles as well, in "The Man With Two Brains," starring Steve Martin and Kathleen Turner, and in television's "Twilight Zone," "Amazing Stories," "Webster," "Growing Pains," and in a Michael J. Fox Pepsi commercial.

Binnie's trainer, Karen Dew, who also trained the other animals in the show, including the Rottweiler and white rat that Binnie "turns into," began working professionally with animals in 1974 at an animal park in New Jersey. After moving to California, she began working exclusively with wild animals, especially wolves, and trained and provided animals for such films as "Never Cry Wolf," "Quest For Fire" and "Clan of the Cave Bear." A diminutive woman at 5'3" Karen found wild animals "too risky" after a while and began gravitating toward dogs. She currently works at Animal Actors, a trained animal compound in Thousand Oaks, California.

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is Michael Rachmil, producers are Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson, supervising producer is Joel Thurm.

**THE SCREEN MAGIC OF  
"ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK"**

The beautiful, charismatic Elvira, though clearly the most special of effects, is not the only visual excitement in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release September 30 by New World Pictures. Three teams of veteran screen magicians participated in creating the visual and make-up effects for the film, which boasts many technically challenging and well as varied styles of special effects.

Five key pyrotechnical effects were created and executed by noted special effects coordinator Dennis Dion, whose work in such films as "Karate Kid II," "Murphy's Romance," "Taps" and "The Osterman Weekend" have established him as one of the brightest (no pun intended) practitioners of his craft. For "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," Dion was faced with the difficult tasks of "burning" Elvira at the stake during a lightning storm; blowing up a gas station while Elvira motors away; engulfing Elvira's house in flames; launching surface-to-air rockets, and exploding cemetery gravestones during a spectacular multi-effects battle between Elvira and Uncle Vincent.

As with most special effects stunts, these were illusions, that is, Dion did not actually blow up a gas station; he instead filled a forty foot trench in front of the station with 400 grain primer cord and 100 gallons of gasoline and, together with debris mortars used to simulate property

destruction, set them off. The explosion, which shot flames forty feet into the air, erupts behind Elvira as she unwittingly escapes danger.

Of all the stunts he coordinated, Dion says "the burning at the stake was the toughest. It had to be highly choreographed as it involved our star in close quarters with flames and intense heat, hundreds of extras holding torches, and lightning bolts crackling out of the lightning machine." The scene took five days to shoot and, though never really dangerous, did cause a moment of concern when the heat from the flames began melting Elvira's wig. "She was never in any danger," Dion says, "but it couldn't have been too comfortable."

Special make-up effects responsibilities fell to Doug Beswick, who has performed miniature, stop motion animation and puppetry effects on such films as "Beetlejuice," "The Terminator," "The Three Amigos," "Aliens," and "Nightmare On Elm Street III." Along with special effects make-up artist Steve Laporte, Beswick also helped create and animate two sophisticated effects--a table top monster and a crawling hand with a mind of its own--and the three stage warlock make-up worn by W. Morgan Sheppard (Uncle Vincent). The Uncle Vincent make-up required "four hours of application a day," Beswick says, "which involved subtle to more extreme facial appliances that created the illusion of an ongoing transformation of a man into a warlock."

Visual effects supervisor Peter Donen, who has worked on more than 100 films, including "Gremlins," "Superman," "Altered States," and "Outland," had the responsibility of supervising the lightning and dog transformation special effects sequences, as well as supplying the photographic effects once the film was finished. "There were a lot of things happening all at once on

this film," Donen says, "and it took a great deal of cooperation and great timing on behalf of all three special effects teams in order to pull it off. Everyone was professional and inventive, not to mention fast. So we were able to do a lot of work in a shorter than usual time frame."

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#### **ELVIRA'S MACABREMOBILE: THE HOTTEST WHEELS ON THE ROAD**

One of the key questions during pre-production of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release September 30 by New World Pictures, was "What would Elvira drive?"

As with other aspects of Elvira's personal life, this has never been revealed on her long-running, popular television show, "Movie Macabre." Being that Elvira lives in Southern California, and that one's mode of transportation here speaks volumes about personality, style and station, it was imperative that Elvira have something special, something, well, appropriately weird.

Cassandra Peterson (Elvira) and producers Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson gave the matter much thought before filming ever began. Then, as Peterson and Pierson were strolling along Hollywood's trendy Melrose Avenue one day, they spotted what surely would be Elvira's dream car: a restored, completely customized 1958 black convertible T-Bird, a great year for long, extended fins and sleek styling. "That's what Elvira would drive!" they simultaneously agreed.

Finding one proved to be a little more difficult. The film's transportation coordinator, Mike Doyle, looked everywhere and discovered only a very few, all of which were valuable collector's cars. Since the production would necessarily need to re-do the car in a bizarre fashion, renting such a classic was out of the question. Doyle finally found a 1958 T-Bird hard top with all the necessary options (such as a working engine) for \$2,500. So, his crew went to work matching the specifications laid out by Peterson, producers Gardner and Pierson and director James Signorelli. While they were at it, Doyle and his crew added their own special touches, adding another \$7,000-plus in alterations. The result one month later: the one-of-a-kind, nowhere-else-to-be-found, souped-up, vision on wheels, The Macabremobile.

The Macabremobile features the finest in eccentric styling: leopard skin upholstery, a shiny silver spider web custom front grill, license plate

that reads "KICKASS," big white wall tires, hub caps sporting silver skull and cross bones on rotating ball bearings so that they are discernable even while driving down the road, barbed wire surrounding the license plates as well as the rear view mirror, a garlic garland hanging from the mirror, a miniature grim reaper statue mounted on the dash, a solid chain steering wheel with a pentagram and skull and cross bones in its center, metal skulls and pointed studs dotting the interior and dash, a skull knob on the gear shift and a large hood ornament of a buxom woman (no relation).

In the film, Elvira drives her majestic machine cross country from Los Angeles to the mythical Fallwell, Mass., where the car is almost as much a surprise to the good townsfolk as is their new neighbor. Upon arriving, the exhausted auto blows its top, literally, as its hood blasts off and into the air, which is the first glimpse Fallwell gets of Elvira.

The cross country trip the car makes in the film is not the only one planned for it. The Macabremobile will continue rolling down the highway even after the release of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," say the filmmakers. The unique car will be displayed at various auto shows and will appear in other promotions in cities around the world, prior to and following release. One thing is certain, however, the Macabremobile, like The Lone Ranger's Silver and Roy Roger's Trigger, will faithfully join Elvira in her subsequent cinematic adventures.

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#### SETTING THE VISUAL TONE

One of the unusual challenges facing the filmmakers of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," a theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release September 30 by New World Pictures, was how to visually transfer the entirely black and white (faced) Elvira character from her stark, one-dimensional television set, where she reclined on a blood red sofa in front of black drapes for seven years, to the "real," more complex, multi-colored world of the motion picture without making Elvira look like an ink blot moving against contrasting scenery.

This job was largely the responsibility of director James Signorelli ("Easy Money") and production designer John DeCuir, Jr. ("Top Gun"). Says Signorelli, "Your eye naturally goes to Elvira anyway, so we knew we had to tone down her surroundings to create a more even blend of colors and images."

DeCuir concurs. "We created around her a reality disengaged just enough so that this wild, beautiful, sexy character is just comfortable enough to provide, by contrast, some visual fun. We found that colors, of her co-stars costumes, of the furniture, etc., needed to be selected very carefully in order to create a certain veracity to her environment. Granted the reality is pushed, but we're playing the comedy against fairly realistic backgrounds in order to pull reality in closer to her character."

DeCuir was faced with a related task twice before. He served as the art director on "Ghostbusters" and as production designer on "Fright Night," both supernatural comedies, and both featuring unreal situations set against realistic settings. But "I've never had the kind of challenge I've had on this picture," DeCuir is quick to add. "You normally don't have the lead of a film in front of the camera this much wearing only black, like a silhouette running around in front of everything."

It was left for Signorelli and DeCuir then to look at the black and white versus color element as a positive rather than a negative. The trick, according to the two veterans, was to create a background that "Elvira's wonderful outrageousness worked against," DeCuir says. After all, Elvira herself offers as unusual and visually exciting a sight as one can find in movies today. Why try to compete with that?

Director and production designer went to work before filming ever began, choosing shapes and forms and colors that would play best against and behind the perpetually black and white temptress. They were involved in all decisions, from the coloring and shapes of costumes, buildings, hairdos, animals, special effects and other make-up to, of course, the all important camera lighting. The result, the overall look of "Elvira,

"Mistress of the Dark," is their creation, and their triumph over a most unusual cinematographic challenge.

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### **"ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK"**

#### **COLUMN ITEMS**

Dale Peterson, father of Elvira (Cassandra Peterson) and in real life an Allstate Insurance representative, portrays...an Allstate Insurance representative in "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," Elvira's first theatrical comedy from NBC Productions and Queen "B" Productions for release by New World Pictures. Film is directed by James

Signorelli ("Easy Money") and produced by Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson and Executive Produced by Michael Rachmil. Joel Thurm is Supervising Producer.

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"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," cult queen Elvira's first theatrical comedy, features a town with businesses as strange as its newest resident. Fallwell, Massachusetts is the fictional little New England hamlet and its eye-popping storefronts on The Burbank Studios lot included : the Pick 'N Save Orphanage; Bigelow, Cheatum and Wynn, Attorneys at Law; and Patti's Tidy Bowl Lanes Bowling Alley. Characters in the film include two names to remember as well: Chastity Pariah (played by Edie McClurg) and Vincent Talbot (played by W. Morgan Sheppard), in honor of Vincent Price and Lawrence Talbot, the Wolf Man.

\* \* \*

Joel Thurm, both the supervising producer on "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" and Vice President, Talent at NBC-TV, has cast thousands of actors in motion pictures and television programs over the years. He experienced a first on the "Elvira" set when producers Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson asked Thurm to play an extra, a barber who joins in the community ogling of Elvira as she enters the quaint New England town of Fallwell. Thurm's reaction to being in front of the camera? "I loved it, but never again!"

\* \* \*

"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" star Cassandra Peterson burst onto the Los Angeles scene as a member of the famed L.A. improv troupe, The Groundlings, as did Paul Reubens (Pee Wee Herman). So how did

Peterson acknowledge her showbusiness beginning in this town? She invited other noted Groundlings to participate in the NBC Productions/Queen "B" production. Edie McClurg (also starring on "Valerie's Family"), Lynn Stewart, Deryl Carroll, Joey Arias, Tress McNeil and John Paragon (who also co-wrote the screenplay) all join the cast of this outrageous comedy adventure for release by New World Pictures. (See Groundlings Feature)

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"Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" make-up artist Pamela Westmore descends from one of Hollywood's most illustrious families. The Westmores reined as the premiere make-up artists from the time great-grandfather George established the first ever studio make-up department in Hollywood in 1917. Six sons born to George (including Pamela's grandfather Wally) all rose to the most prominent positions in the studio make-up business from the 1920's until recently when youngest brother Frank passed away in 1985. Their contributions to the creative art of screen make-up are heralded to this day. (See Westmore Feature)

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One of the most unusual sights on the set of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark" was Elvira's "Macabremobile." A fully customized and restored 1958 black convertible T-Bird, the Macabremobile features a host of outrageous one-of-a-kind details found only on a car Elvira would own. Constructed by transportation coordinator Mike Doyle, to the specifications of Cassandra Peterson, producers Eric Gardner and Mark Pierson and director James Signorelli, the Macabremobile boasts fake leopard skin upholstery, a shiny spider web custom front

grill, license plates that read "Kickass," big white wall tires, hub caps sporting silver skull and cross bones on rotating ball bearings, barbed wire surrounding the license plates as well as the rear view mirror, a garlic garland hanging from the mirror, a solid chain steering wheel with a pentagram and skull and cross bones in its center, metal skulls and pointed studs dotting the interior and dash and a skull knob on the gear shift.

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A little known fact about Cassandra Peterson, star of "Elvira, Mistress of the Dark," is that she started her show business career in Las Vegas as a dancer. And if it weren't for Elvis Presley, who knows, her career may have been entirely different today. The King of Rock and Roll spotted her in a revue show and encouraged her to expand her horizons. Which she did. As soon as she could, Cassandra headed for Europe where she joined a rock band as its lead singer. A trip to Rome accidentally got her a part in Fellini's "Roma," and hooked her on films. That was enough to entice her to try her luck in Los Angeles and, as they say, the rest is history.

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# CREPY RICK'S CRYPT



*Morticia. Lilly Munster. The Brides of Dracula. Vampirella. Vampira—The women of horror have been a fascination to this ghoul since pre-puberty. Now, joy of joys. I get to meet one live on the phone! I spoke with **ELVIRA** about her upcoming feature film, **ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK**, and learned a few other things about the macabre movie hostess. It was a dreadful delight.*

Hello this is Creepy Rick?

Indeed, Elvira? How are you doin'?

Good. How's it goin'?

Good. Good.

So, I read your magazine the other day I was at UCLA and I went to the magazine bookstore and it was there.

So what'd you think?

I thought it was real funny. I liked it. I thought it was really great.

Yeah, we try to be a little off the wall.

Yes, it's very off the wall. It's good.

Well, thanks. So, let's talk about the movie. It's called...

Elvira, Mistress of the Dark.

(I drop the phone in utter disbelief and excitement. I'm actually talking to Elvira. Those—that uh...she's not far from my boiling blood!)

When are we lookin' at a release on this?

September 30th, 1988. (The anniversary of the death of James Dean, what a coincidence)

How are things going right now, is everything wrapped up?

It's going really good, I have some pick up shots that I'm going to be doing next week. And we're shooting a big song and dance number.

Is it scary?

The movie or the dance number?

Both.

(LAUGH) Well, I hope the dance number is not going to be but the movie not really what you'd call a scary movie, no.

More like campy horror?

Yeah, it's not made to be real scary, there's a couple sordid scary moments.

Who directed it?

Jim Signorelli and he directed Rodney Dangerfield in *Easy Money*. Also for the last seven years he has been directing all the short films on Saturday Night Live, y'know the commercial take-offs.

What's the plot? Is there a plot?

It starts out, I'm a horror movie hostess in L.A., which I am, and I'm getting fed up with my job and as luck would have it a telegram arrives and an aunt has passed away that I didn't even know I had and she's left me an inheritance and my real dream is to try and get out of this crummy job I'm in and go to Vegas and be a headliner there and star in my own Vegas show. So, I have to get the money to put my act together and go to Vegas so when I get this telegram from my aunt I figure, Oh Great I'm gonna get all this big bucks. So, I quit my job and travel all the way across the country to this town called Fallwell, Massachusetts, which is kind of like a Salem Massachusetts type town. I kind of move into the town and all the people hate my guts because it's an extremely conservative New England town. So here's this woman that looks like Elvira coming into their town, which



## TITS! KNOCKERS! BOOBS!

go to Vegas so I can't really tell you . . .

*Don't give away the ending. I heard that you did work in Vegas as a stri-*

Yeah, I was a showgirl there so it's kind of like my own nightmare coming true going back to Vegas.

*Any names you want to drop, who's in it?*

Well, there's no big stars a few well known actors Edie McClurg, she was in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, she played the principals

secretary, and Morgan Shepard who plays my uncle, played the older guy with the mohawk on the *Max Headroom* show, Jeff Conway from *Taxi*.

*Oh, I was hoping Pee Wee was in it.*

Yeah, I was too actually. It's funny, Pee Wee and I long ago talked about each of us doing cameos in each other's movies and then what happened was we were filming our movies exactly at the same time, so he was working 5-11 and I was working the same hours on mine, so that great idea fell by the wayside.

*So you and him are friends I hear?*

Yeah, we're real good friends, we have been for, God, for 10, 11 years, way before he was Pee Wee and I was Elvira.

*Wow, what an odd couple!*

Y'know I often think how bizarre it is that we both ended up doing such a similar thing really. One had nothing to do with the other and we both ended up being these cartoon characters, it's really a very odd coincidence. It may not be totally coincidence, it may come from our background both being in this group

called the Groundlings, this group that we were both in. The way I met Paul (*Pee Wee*) was that we were both in the Groundlings which is like L.A.'s version of Second City, a real popular comedy improvisational group so one of the things we did in improv was develop these different weird characters. He developed Pee Wee at the Groundling, however I did not develop Elvira at the Groundling. I developed it... I got an audition where they just wanted this horror hostess then I had to think of a character. So I ended up in a weird looking outfit. I guess it's not totally coincidental. My other best friend, also from the Groundling, who writes *Pee Wee's* television show and is Jombi the Geenie is John Paragon, and he also wrote my movie with me and has been writing my movie macabre scripts, my TV show with me for 6 or 7 years, so I mean (LAUGH) he's another cartoon character.

*So, are you ever going to be on Pee Wee's Playhouse?*

I'd have to severely alter the cleavage I'm afraid. It'd be fun to be on, but I have a policy of never wearing anything higher cut than my dress, no matter what they want to do. If you don't like it then tough! (*She'd be competition for Globey!*)

*Any sequels on the horizon or plans beyond this?*

It'll all depend on if the movie's successful or not. Yeah, we have begun thinking about sequels. So far the movie looks really good, if I do say so myself, it looks like it's going to be real funny, everybody is real happy with it so I have my fingers crossed if there's going to be a sequel. I really would like to make another film rather than going back and hosting more horror movies which I love, but I've pretty much exhausted the library of bad horror movies.

*Got any favorite horror movies?*

They're like so bad I don't know if you'd call them favorite. I like all the Edward G. Wood movies, nothing surpasses those, I've seen bad stuff but his takes the cake. Of course, I've never been able to host any of these because I haven't been able to get a hold of whoever holds the rights. Everything from *Plan Nine* to *Glen or Glenda* are absolutely brilliant.

*Do you like more classic horror stuff,*

they're not too happy about. It's kind of got shades of *Harper Valley PTA*. So I come into town and my inheritance is a house, my aunt's dog, and a book, and I end up having to live in town and find a job there.

*Did they need a horror hostess?*

No, they didn't need a horror hostess. So I try to get a normal job there but no one will hire me and so while they are trying to get me out of town I discover an Uncle who I've never met and in this part of the movie you see a flashback, the Roots of Elvira.

*All right! The Origin?*

It's weird and kind of flashes back into my past. You find out I was raised in an orphanage by nuns, and you find out that I also came from a kind of mysterious... my mother turns out to have been a sorceress and I have inherited these powers that I didn't know I had. So then the movie kind of takes off, the uncle tries to take the powers away from me and I'm kind of oblivious of the whole thing happening and it becomes a battle between the town and myself to get me out and the uncle trying to get the power away from me and me trying to get enough money to get the hell out of this town and

y'know Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Karloff...

Yeah, I like them a lot. I don't usually use that for my show because I never want to knock what I consider to be a really good movie, I mean, I don't think the horror fans would appreciate it either. But I do get my share of Peter Cushing, John Carradine, all those guys 'cause I've done the library of Hammer films. I love Vincent Price too, he's my idol.

*Would that be a dream, to work with him someday?*

I have worked with him, he's been on my television show a few times and we've done various talkshows together. We did the Tonite Show together, we've done a lot of Sci-Fi Awards, things like that. I wanted Vincent Price very much for the title role in my movie to play the uncle, and as a matter of fact I named the character Vincent and unfortunately at this time in his career he's decided he doesn't want to do any more horror movies. Bad timing.

*What's he like? He seems like a real nice guy.*

Not only is he the nicest guy, but he should be a stand up comedian. He's the funniest guy in the world. I mean, I look up to him not as a horror actor, but as a comedian. He's absolutely brilliant. The guy is a crack-up, y'know he's sort of getting up there in years but he has the sharpest wit in the world. He's just a really wonderful person and I love him.

*That's one thing I've noticed, the really good horror actors are the complete opposite in real life, they're not real dark evil characters.*

I know isn't that funny, this is true. Everyone I've ever met is like the sweetest, nicest. I'd even put myself in that category. I mean everyone expects me to be the world's meanest bitch. A lot of people are surprised when they meet me "Oh, I can't believe you're so nice!" It's always a shock to them, I think I'm so normal.

## **BAZOOMS! BREASTS! TORPEDOES!**

*Anything else you want to say about the movie besides go see it?*

I think people are going to be surprised. This is not what people are going to expect. From the test audiences that we had, I don't know what they're expecting, but at the end of it they're saying, "God, this is not at all what we expected." Perhaps they expect me to be hosting a movie. I think people will be real surprised about what it is, it's not what people will think it will be.



*As long as Elvira is in the movie, we don't care what it's about.*

*When he's not writing horror for publications like FILM THREAT and MONSTERS A GO-GO, Creepy Rick howls and groans horror with his Monster-Rock band The 3-D Invisibles. For info on the band and their records write:*

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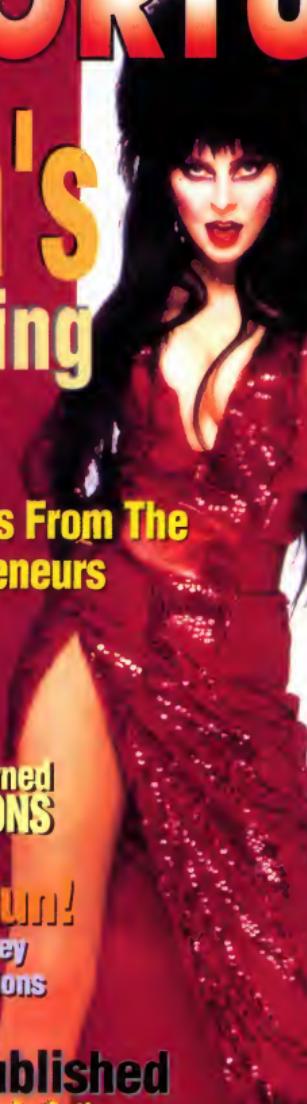
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# The Scary Success Story of Elvira

Entrepreneurs Cassandra Peterson and Mark Pierson describe how they made consumers batty over a busty vamp

By Daniel A. Joelsson

Photograph by David Goldner



Photograph by Michael Maron

In August of 1981, a young temporary secretary went on an audition at a television studio in Los Angeles to host a late-night horror movie series. While the leggy woman, Cassandra Peterson, impressed the executives of THJ television enough for them to ask her to host the show, they first wanted her to doll up the character's image as a sexy Vampire. With the help of her husband, Mark Pierson, and a friend, Robert Redding, Peterson designed a wig, makeup and a dress and stormed back to the television studio, where she revealed herself as a startling new figure: a busty, quasi-Vampire with a goofy Valley girl personality that, today, is recognized across the nation as simply Elvira, Mistress of the Dark.

In the years since this unlikely celebrity materialized as hostess of the television film, *Movie Macabre*, Elvira has won legions of fans worldwide, been immortalized in a wax museum, and completed more deals than a slick Hollywood agent. Behind the ingenious "mom

Cassandra Peterson has been masquerading as the character Elvira since 1981. "I feel like there are two of me," says Peterson.

and pop" team of Peterson and her manager-husband Pierson, the farcical Elvira has signed dozens of licensing agreements, racked up thousands of dollars in personal appearances, and had a best-selling record and pinball machine, three books, a feature film and even a critically-acclaimed microbrewed beer. The only question is: What type of business venture has the dynamic duo of Peterson and Pierson not tried? In creating their enormously successful character, the

couple has employed a wide range of business strategies, while exploiting Peterson's devilishly good talent.

## An Overnight Success

The two leaders of the tiny Hollywood-based company called Creative Minds Entertainment are perfect complements, with Peterson acting as the creative half and Pierson as the business guru. At first, the one-two punch had no clue that Elvira was to blossom into their very own Frankenstein (of sorts). But only a couple of weeks after they launched the character, signs indicated a monstrous star in the making: people began to howl for the couple's brainchild to appear at beauty salons, grocery stores -- even a Bar Mitzvah -- offering Peterson the "generous" sum of about \$100 an appearance.

"Oh, my God, I can't believe it!" recalls Peterson, who was an aspiring actress at the time. "We were in absolute shock that people would actually pay me to come and show up at their place." Back then, she figured her new role would be "just another acting job," she says in a humble, low-key and very un-

KODAK 2011

Photograph by Mary Ann Halpin



Elvira-esque tone. "And I'll do this for a few weeks or months or whatever, and then I'll be looking for another gig." But over 15 years later, Peterson is still making a living as the character, and is fetching anywhere from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for each public appearance.

Driving the character's growth has been Pierson's and Peterson's tireless and cagey marketing efforts. It started with a fan club, which the couple established as an inexpensive tool through which they could expand Elvira's popularity. The club, which has lured tens of thousands of members over the years, immediately boosted awareness of Elvira, and by spring of 1982 she was chosen to appear in a three-dimensional special on television. It was the first time anyone had been taped and broadcast in 3-D in America, according to Pierson. The event enabled 7-11 stores to sell approximately two-and-a-half million glasses, and for Elvira, it led to a guest appearance on both *The Tonight Show* and *The Today Show*. Although the fledgling entrepreneurs got "aced out on royalties and on a share of money made on the sale of the glasses," according to

Pierson, he and Peterson had quickly launched the character nationwide.

As the character's popularity snowballed, the two remained a small enterprise. Initially, they tried to hook up with a large studio; however, their attempts were thwarted. In retrospect, Pierson views this as a "blessing in disguise." Rather than getting swallowed up by Disney or some other large studio that would control the character's fortunes, they were able to tighten the reins and take the character into one creative foray after another. According to Pierson, when dealing with the likes of the Warner Brothers and the Universals, the big studios seize a character and try to capitalize on its popularity by selling ancillary products like T-shirts that are graced with the character's image. While that can work to the creator's advantage, those characters that fall out of favor with the studios -- whether for a good reason or not -- are put on a backburner. "Nothing's done with them. They are ignored," explains Pierson. "Had we been owned and controlled by one of these behemoth entertainment companies we probably would have since been forgotten."



Photograph by David Goldner

To keep the family business small Pierson has handled its financial affairs virtually alone, while Peterson, the talent, receives only occasional help from people outside like John Paragon, a co-author of her books. "I really consider our business a little bit like a mom-and-pop store, where my husband and I run the business," says Peterson, who in her major film, *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark*, seemed the farthest thing from being a "mom." "And we decide what we'll do and what we'll pitch. Things come to us, and we try to keep a lot of control over them. It's really a two-man show."

While they have kept the character firmly in their hands, Peterson and Pierson have also been crafty enough to enjoy the benefits of partnering with big companies. For example, rather than hiring their own public relations representatives, they've taken advantage of those with fatter wallets. When they worked on projects with NBC, New World Pictures and Rhino Records, they used the companies' respective PR departments. And when Elvira appeared on television, the business relied on the networks to generate publicity. "We've always taken advantage of that," says

Pierson, "because we don't have the deep pockets to pay \$2,000 or \$3,000 per month for a publicist, month after month, year after year."

### Queen of Licensing

One of the main ways that Elvira's keepers have increased her exposure is by signing dozens of licensing agreements. The couple has aggressively licensed the character to companies -- most of them small -- that emblazon Elvira's image on everything from Halloween decorative lighting and pinball machines to calendars and trading cards. Licensors Peterson and Pierson collect royalties ranging from 5 to 15 percent off the sales of the company which licenses the Elvira character. "The licensing part of the Elvira business has played a very im-



portant role in building her name and recognition across the country," says Pierson.

Pierson, who heads Queen "B" Productions, the company which licenses the campy character, indicates that he hasn't turned down many requests from bona fide businesses seeking an Elvira license. Rather, he's taken a cautious approach, demanding money up front; this, he explains, has weeded out the fly-by-night companies. Consequently, the Elvira character has snatched up about 50 licenses, which have won her a wealth of exposure in a diverse set of markets. "The merchandise filled in all the gaps," says Pierson. "Comic books would go into comic book stores, records would go into record stores,

greeting cards would go into stationery stores. And I think that's really what built the character up over all these years." Licensing is particularly important to the couple because one of their goals has to date eluded them. "We've never really had the luxury of a prime time sit-com show -- a regular series that would give Elvira the type of exposure that so many other characters, personalities and actors have," he says.

Without that television presence, the couple has resourcefully worked to get Elvira on screen. In fact, she seems to pop up unannounced just about everywhere. She makes over a dozen guest appearances per year on television, and has been on shows including Entertainment Tonight, Regis & Kathie Lee, Monday Night Football, Ricki Lake, CNN and MTV. She also makes up to 40 non-screen appearances nationwide per year, signing autographs, judging costume contests and presenting awards at venues such as car shows, nightclubs, shopping centers and major corporations.

To get the biggest bang for their buck, the Peterson-Pierson tandem has fo-

## The Elvira/Peterson Empire

### Feast your eyes on the frightening list of just some of Cassandra Peterson's (Elvira's) financial feats

#### Licensing

Signed about 50 licensing agreements with companies such as Bally/Midway, Claypool Comics and Rhino Records.

#### Books

With John Paragon, wrote *Camp Vamp*, *Transylvania 90210* and *The Boy Who Cried Werewolf*.

#### Personal Appearances

Appears publicly up to 40 times per year and receives between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per appearance.

#### Films

Starred in the movie, *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark* in 1988.

Appeared with Burt Reynolds in *Stroker Ace*.

Peterson has appeared as herself in dozens of movies.

#### Television

Appeared in *Movie Macabre*, the show that launched her career in August 1981.

Makes about a dozen television appearances per year.

#### Perfume

Launched the perfume, "Evil," in over 15,000 retail outlets in 1990.

#### Microbrewed Beer

Created Elvira's Night Brew. Placed fourth out of 38 in the dark lager category at a recent Great American Beer Festival in Denver.

cused much of their energies on the bewitched holiday. They've turned Elvira into the "Santa Claus of Halloween," in the words of Pierson. "Halloween is the second biggest holiday of the year," he says, "the second biggest decorative goods holiday (it passed Easter), and the second biggest alcohol consumption of the year (it surpassed Super Bowl Sunday and St. Patrick's Day, and is second only to New Year's)." Yet, he notes, while New Year's is only a day-long or, at

most, a weekend-long celebration, Halloween is one-month long.

While retail already peaks for the duo during Halloween, they're trying to boost spirits by feverishly promoting it as a titillating -- and lengthy -- holiday for both children and adults alike. "Fifteen or 16 years ago when we first got started, maybe half or more than half of the business was children, and now over half the dollars are adult dollars," says Pierson of Halloween. "The typical adult spends

over \$100 for a costume now, whereas I think the typical children's costume is \$15. And adults are buying alcohol, which is a lot more expensive than buying candy."

### Elvira in Cyberspace

Although the vamp Elvira is the top American Halloween icon and may have risen from the dead thousands of years ago, Peterson and Pierson have ensured that she is also a master with cutting-edge technology. "People would say, 'Elvira and computers, how do you make that connection?'" says Pierson. "And well, computers are like cars. Everyone uses computers. It's no different. And there's a predominantly male audience to begin with in the computer world -- in the Web world." Elvira has greeted her large male following with five personalized computer games, which have become big sellers both nationally and abroad.

The character has also made a major push onto the Internet. In 1995, Elvira did a live online chat on America Online, attracting the largest audience the Internet service provider had ever overseen for a cyberspace discussion. She's also been featured on numerous Web sites, including those of TV Guide, Computer Life and Rhino Records, and Peterson and Pierson are currently looking to develop an Elvira site for America Online or Microsoft Network. Meanwhile, their own Web page (<http://www.elvira.com>) has drawn a lot of traffic. On their "humble little site," the couple posts a photo of Elvira, lists her upcoming events and sells merchandise. With a minimal investment, they've generated sales and turned a profit, according to Pierson.

For companies like Creative Minds Entertainment, the Internet could be the answer to their marketing dreams. While intent on giving Elvira national exposure, Peterson and Pierson have yet to score another Elvira show and they loathe to spend big advertising dollars. "We've had enormous frustrations with trying to get a television series happening with Elvira and getting another Elvira movie made," says the 41-year-old Pierson. "And the way I see it going with the Web, anyone and everyone could be their own broadcaster."

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potatoes are both surfing and watching TV on a computer -- Pierson is licking his lips at the possibility of reaching thousands of potential Elvira fans inexpensively. "I have hundreds of hours of Elvira on videotape that I could put on her Web site," he says. "I could take photos and put them on her Web site. I could change it daily. I could change it weekly, monthly or however often I want to charge people to watch movies on the Elvira Web site.

"It's all going that way. It's not going to be a 500 channel universe. It's going to be a 50 million to 5 billion channel universe, because everyone will be able to put on their own computer, through their own computer, video images, photo-

to images, graphic images and, of course, text. So, with Web TV -- with the Internet and television merging and everything going digital here in this country in the next few years -- I see it as an opportunity to finally be able to have my own Elvira television station."

### Wicked Talent

No amount of marketing prowess would have helped Elvira create an empire without Peterson's talent and ability to fabricate a character that has mass appeal. Peterson has both dance and voice training, and actually began her career as a showgirl in Las Vegas. She still performs live, and she has recorded five albums, including a best-selling record for Rhi-

no Records, and has had over 500 television or film appearances.

Pierson, who calls Peterson a "woman of many talents," considers her a comedienne first. "The most important thing that I ever did was take comedy improv, which really enables you to think on your feet," explains Peterson. "A lot of what Elvira does is unplanned. You just have to make it up on the spot." For several years, she worked with the comedy improvisational group called the Groundlings, which spawned such big names as Pee Wee Herman, John Lovitz and Phil Hartman. It was there that Peterson created the Valley Girl personality with which she wowed the Los Angeles television studio in 1981. She's also an accomplished writer, having written three books, a feature film, a pilot for CBS and hundreds of television shows.

Elvira's success is also due to "the look." As Pierson puts it, "Elvira has one of the most famous cleavages in the country." The chest, like the character, is a carefully sculpted image. Elvira's bra is similar to the hot-selling Wonderbra, except, Pierson says, Elvira's came along a couple of years earlier and is probably better designed. "Industrial-strength," Peterson calls the lingerie. And just what do the bras mean to her career? "Oh, they're my life," she says, laughing. "I just hope that they make them heavy-duty enough to keep me going for awhile." One of the couple's biggest business letdowns, in fact, has been their failure to find a bra manufacturer that will license the Elvira character. "All of a sudden the Wonderbra comes out," says Peterson. "And I'm going, 'Oh yea, like the Wonderbra! That's nothing compared to my bra. I mean, my bra would put cleavage on a dog.'"

Listen to her tell it, and you'd think Peterson was past her peak. In fact, though, her character is only getting stronger, and she's had to keep in good shape to pull it off. Asked when she plans to quit, she responds, "Five years ago." Yet, now age 45, she says, "I still look okay." And her fans seem to agree. "Oh my God, you look exactly the same! You never age!" she says they tell her. "And I go, 'Wow, cool!' Probably because there's so much makeup. When you have that much makeup and hair and everything on, it's really hard to tell what the person un-

## Elvira's Brew-Haha

### From first woman to promote beer to microbrewer extraordinaire

Part of Peterson's marketing savvy has come in the realm of beers. Her popularity with beer-swilling males led Bob Fox, head of marketing at Coors Beer, to bring Elvira to his company and help make her the first female celebrity to promote beer.

In 1986, Elvira began eight to nine years of on-again, off-again work as a spokesperson for Coors. Then, about two years ago, Coors decided to stop television and radio advertising, which was the death knell for Elvira's association with the company. Peterson and Pierson made the tactical decision of bowing out. "For us, it was an important part of her national visibility to have television and radio exposure," explains Pierson. "So when that was eliminated from the deal, and when Coors also said, 'How about if we pay you half as much because we're not doing TV or radio?,' we thought, 'We're your most successful campaign and Halloween is now the second biggest beer consumption holiday of the year, and you're pulling out of it?' It doesn't make sense. It was like we were being punished for our success."

A short time later Peterson and Pier-

son linked up with a company called Beverage International, which then was headed by none other than Bob Fox. Peterson and Pierson signed a deal for Elvira to market her own specialty craft microbrew. While the line of microbrewed beer didn't last long (the ven-



ture capitalist backing the brewer pulled out and the company's initial public offering failed to go through), nevertheless, says Pierson, "It did very well." Last fall, the beer, which was produced at Elvira's Brewhouse in Minnesota, was in upwards of 40 states. And at the Great American Beer Festival in Denver, the biggest beer festival in the country, Elvira's Night Brew placed fourth out of 38 beers in a blind taste test.

# ELVIRA

MISTRESS OF THE DARK



42 OF 72

At 14,000, Cassie Peterson gets "out there" on a regular basis to support 10 causes in which she believes. In 1990, example she served at Grand Marshall West Hollywood's 20th Annual Gay & Lesbian Pride Parade.

NAP



# ELVIRA

MISTRESS OF THE DARK



6 OF 72

Elvira performed her first live show in October of 1982, when she appeared at the Knott's Berry Farm annual Halloween Haunt.

NAP



derneath looks like." Peterson does admit that she is in perhaps the best shape of her life. "I work out like a dog."

### How Elvira Charms

What has Peterson done with the character to make the public swoon over it? Simple. Instead of creating "that old tired Vampire schtick," she created a unique character that people could relate to. "She kind of has a vulnerability that I think people connect with, believe it or

not," says Peterson. "And she is also like the regular everyday beer-drinking guy or gal. She is not above everybody and more fabulous. She is just like everyone, even though she looks like she does. So I think that people connect with her on a more personal level.

"It's strange to say that when she looks so bizarre. But personality-wise, she makes mistakes — she falls down, she bumps her head," she continues, laughing. "She does things that everybody else

does and then she tries to cover her tracks without anybody noticing. So it's kind of a self-deprecating character too, and people just connect with that I think."

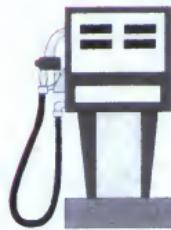
One of the reasons the character has stood the test of time is because of Elvira's ability to appeal to a widely-diverse audience. Although her coarse humor may seem like the stuff boys snicker at on the walls of their high school bathroom, she's been able to coax a chuckle out of people of both sexes and all ages.

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Males embrace her as a sex symbol, comic book readers view her as a cartoon character, and horror movie junkies and Halloween party-goers appreciate her links to the dark side. "And it's funny," says Peterson, "young women, little girls and old grannies" are also fans. "It's weird what shows up when I do an appearance." Pierson explains that Elvira has been able to appeal to such a broad group because she represents something different for everyone. "For children she's sort of slapstick and goofy. She makes faces and just is kind of a wacky kind of character," he says. "Adults appreciate the double entendres which the children don't get. It just goes over their heads."

Oddly enough to some, a large part of Elvira's following is female. When Elvira was doing original programming in Los Angeles from 1981 to 1986, the largest demographic group watching was women aged 17 to 35. "Women love my character," says Peterson. "I am selling sex on the one hand -- sort of, you know, low cleavage and a sexy image. But on the other hand, I think of Elvira very much as a feminist. And I've made a big point of when Elvira gets herself into

messes -- like in my films or TV shows -- she's the one who is responsible for getting herself out. No man comes along and saves her in the nick of time. She doesn't go off and marry some guy who pays the bills or anything like that. And she does treat men a little bit like a lot of men treat women -- she kind of uses them."

She also attracts a large international following, which Pierson and Peterson have taken pains to cultivate. They've done a Halloween Elvira promotion at Japanese theme parks and a television series and some merchandising in Australia. Their pinball machine sells well in Germany, France and Japan. And two films, "Superstition" and "Thrill Ride," are to be released around the world this summer. They're also hoping that Halloween grows in popularity in other parts of the world so that "Elvira will come into Japan or Europe on the coattails of Halloween," says Pierson. Or, she'll "help lead Halloween into these countries." Peterson's following is so diverse that Playboy asked her to be a centerfold (she declined because she feared Elvira would lose her mystique), and Circus of the Stars asked for her to appear at its

## Elvira, The Wicked Wordsmith

Cassandra Peterson loves writing. Why, with her writing partner-in-crime John Paragon, she's penned *Camp Vamp*, *Transylvania 90210* and *The Boy Who Cried Werewolf*.

She's also written a feature film, a pilot for CBS, hundreds of television shows and a sequel to *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark*, which, however, didn't get made.

While she has been very successful in publishing, the most difficult aspect for her is the sheer volume of words that must be written. [See article on page 46 for more information on getting published].

"Writing a book is a lot of work!" exclaims Peterson. "By the time you amortize the amount of hours you put in, I think you must get about \$1.15 per hour!"

"To give you an example: my partner and I wrote and wrote and wrote. We were both going, 'Oh my God, I never wrote this many words in my whole life! This is never-ending.'

"Finally, we finished the book, we sent it in, and the publishing company, Putnam, called us and said, 'Well the good news is, we really love it. But the bad news is it's not thick enough to put a spine on. It's hardly big enough for a pamphlet!' Oh, great [we were thinking], the Elvira pamphlet. So we had to triple the word amount. And that was great after you already had it done!"

Currently, Peterson (as herself) is writing a book with Paragon that is a parody of a children's book.

performance (which she rejected because she's an animal rights activist).

### A Lifelong Creation

By creating an enduring concept and managing their money shrewdly, Peterson and Pierson have basically ensured that they can ride the coattails of the Elvira character for life. "My husband has been a very smart money manager," says Peterson. "He has really invested our money well and made various plans for him, me and now my child. I mean, she

probably has more money than I do." They also live fairly modestly. "We're not over the top -- driving Rolls Royces and stuff and dripping with jewels or anything," says Peterson. "We live very, very well, but not too showy. I think I could stop being Elvira tomorrow, and we'd be fine."

The Peterson-Pierson team can count on receiving licensing fees even after Peterson hangs up the industrial-strength bra. And their two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Sadie, can get licensing fees

"off of Elvira for the rest of her life," Peterson speculates. "I think the character can continue to go on forever. But I may not be dressing up and running around as the character." Not only could the couple license the Elvira image on comic books and other products, but Peterson can -- no matter how much she ages -- continue to masquerade as Elvira to write books and make CDs.

Peterson and Pierson are also considering an Elvira "stroller," which are characters like Frankenstein and Snow White who walk around theme parks. "It would be possible to get other people to play me and they'd just walk around," says Peterson. Pierson is planning to press the character into new arenas, like Las Vegas in hopes of landing Peterson a show in her old stomping grounds. He also has high hopes of helping Halloween to erupt in the nation's cash-flowing capital. "Las Vegas hasn't done anything with the Halloween holiday," he laments. "Halloween's an adult holiday. They drink alcohol, and they get stupid. They are going to lose their money! It's just a holiday made for Las Vegas."

While the Elvira character will continue to pay dividends, Peterson is developing her "true" self as an entrepreneur. She's currently writing a children's book with John Paragon that has nothing to do with Elvira. "I've always enjoyed writing," she says. "And you don't have to look good." She also has experience as a disc jockey and is considering doing a radio program.

Still, it could be hard to put a stake in Elvira's coffin for good. The redheaded Peterson has lived the blessed life of a beloved celebrity who is incognito off the job. While she has been able to live a regular life in Hollywood when dressed as Peterson, on the other hand, she jokes, "When I want my own little adoring fans, I just have to put that dress on and then I have people like licking my boots."

Peterson -- or, uh Elvira -- has, however, paid for her remarkable success as a businesswoman by developing something of a split personality. "I really do feel very much like a schizophrenic now," she says. "I feel like there are two of me. I refer to Elvira as another person. It's so bizarre. I really very much feel like two people. Even my daughter thinks of me as two people." A spooky thought. ○

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